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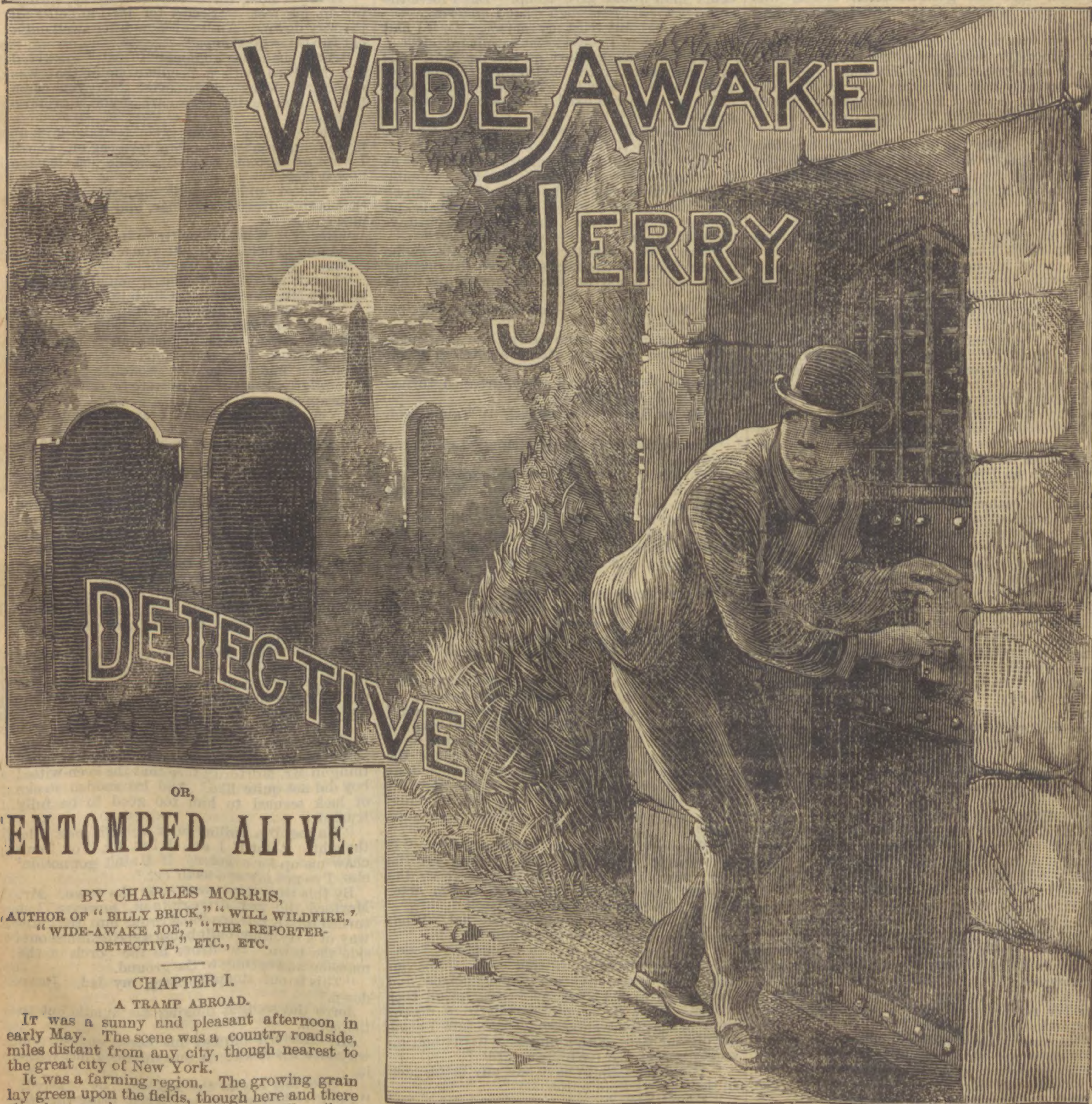
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June 29, 1886.

Vol. XVIII.

\$2.50
a Year.PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.Price,
5 Cents.

No. 466.



OR, 'ENTOMBED ALIVE.'

BY CHARLES MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "BILLY BRICK," "WILL WILDFIRE,"
"WIDE-AWAKE JOE," "THE REPORTER-
DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. A TRAMP ABROAD.

It was a sunny and pleasant afternoon in early May. The scene was a country roadside, miles distant from any city, though nearest to the great city of New York.

It was a farming region. The growing grain lay green upon the fields, though here and there the plow was busy turning up the fertile soil. Farm-houses, with their barns and outbuild-

STOOPING, THE NOW DOUBLY WIDE AWAKE BOY INSERTED THE KEY, WHICH THE ENTOMBED MAN HAD GIVEN HIM, INTO THE LOCK OF THE VULT DOOR.

ings, and their cluster of trees, dotted the landscape. To the south the chimneys and roofs of a village were visible. Several miles to the north appeared what seemed a town of some size.

The point of view from which all this could be seen was the summit of a long hill, which overlooked the country for some distance in every direction.

The grassy bank at the summit was shaded by the thick leaves of a great ash tree, that spread its boughs far over the road. On this shadowy and cool bank had seated himself a weary traveler, who had just toiled up the hill.

He had thrown down the bundle which he carried on his shoulder, and was casting an inquiring glance over the landscape, like one who did not know his ground.

He was not an ordinary tramp—or if so he was a very young one. From his size he might have been taken for a boy of sixteen or seventeen years of age. But the face looked old enough for nineteen or twenty.

It was not what would be called a handsome face, nor an overly clean one, being covered with the dust of travel. But it was a very keen and wide-awake one. His eyes were sharp as steel gimlets, and the good-humored mouth was closed now in a way that showed energy and drive.

There was nothing about him of the lazy, sleepy good-for-nothingness of the genuine tramp. Yet he was dressed in a shabby and ragged suit, that certainly had not been made for him, and the cap that covered his uncombed hair looked as if it had been stolen from some roadside scarecrow.

The boy, after his survey of the country, threw his shabby cap on his bundle, ran his fingers through his hair, and lay back in an easy attitude on the sloping bank.

"Dunno what's in it," he muttered, "but reckon as how maybe somethin' 'll turn up. Never see'd the time yit when I got in a hole as somethin' didn't turn up."

He thrust his hand deep into his pocket, and drew out a scaly apology for a pocket-purse. This he opened, and examined its contents with an odd twist of his features.

"Six cents and a button," he declared. "If that ain't a sweet capital to go inter bizness with! 'Spect I kin make a comfortable bed under the shadler of a fence rail, but where the grub's ter come from gits me. A chap o' my appetite can't make supper and breakfast outer six cents. 'Tain't in ther wood."

He poured his sorry capital into his hand, and sat gazing at it as if with the hope that it would grow under his eyes.

"Dunno as I've struck ile yet," he resumed. "Kinder hard world ter live in, fur a poor orphan 'thout father or mother, or uncle or aunt, or even a granddad or grandmommy. Ain't no show in ther city, that's flat. Too much competition there. Dozen hungry jaws for every loaf o' bread. Had ter peg out or starve. Was gittin' as flat in ther stumjack as a hop-toad arter an elephant's trod on him."

He laughed in a comical way, that showed he had plenty of spirit yet.

"Come out to ther country to seek my fortune," he continued. "Ain't no show in New York, where every chap puts hisself on ther grindstone 'fore breakfast, and sharpens hisself up fur the day. Ther oughter be some innings 'mong these country greenhorns for a coon as has been brung up under ther shadler of ther City Hall. But, bless yer eyes, they all want a chap ter work, and that ain't 'cordin' ter my constertution. Fellers as has got brains don't work with the hands nowadays. I've found out that."

He fell into a fit of reflection, his body gradually sinking back until he rested in a reclining position upon the grassy bank. It was very pleasant here. The insects sung round him with a soft murmur. The wind moved softly through the leaves. His eyes closed.

"Ther's one thing you kin bet yer bottom nickel on," he muttered, in a sleepy fashion. "An' that thing is, that Jeremiah Jarman ain't no slouch. I'm come out yere ter git my work in, an' if I don't 'stonish some o' these smart countrymen 'fore I'm through, then ther's no smakes in Old Virginny. Ain't had my eddication fur nothin', and what I don't know 'bout sharps ain't wuth knowin'."

That was his last waking thought. In a few minutes he was sound asleep. Little it mattered to him whether the hours moved fast or slow, or if fortune was fair or foul. The beggar is the mate of the king when both are asleep.

The sun was getting low down in the western sky. The air had grown somewhat cooler, as

evening approached, and the out-door couch of the sleeping traveler became less comfortable.

But nothing of all this disturbed the sleeper nor did he hear a carriage that came slowly up the log hill, and drew up on reaching the summit.

It was a neatly built road-wagon, drawn by a well-groomed horse, with some show of blood and spirit. A single person occupied the vehicle, a fashionably dressed gentleman, with a somewhat peculiar face.

He had a long, pointed nose, and eyes overhung with bushy eyebrows, while his mouth and chin were hidden by a heavy whisker and mustache, the look upon his face it would have been hard to fathom—a look that was full of doubtful meanings or misgivings—surly, suspicious and hard.

His eyes were fixed upon the distant town, toward which his horse's head was turned. He drew down his brows in a deep frown as he gazed.

"It is an awkward business," he muttered. "All has kept clear so far. But the least wrong move in the game would upset all my calculations, and throw me into an ugly mess. A timid man would give it up. But I have the courage to carry through what I undertake."

"If I could only trust my servants! Or if I had some one whom I could twist to suit myself!"

He gave a slight start at this moment. His eyes had fallen on the boyish form that lay fast asleep by the roadside. The gentleman turned in his carriage and fixed his eyes on him with a keen scrutiny.

Then he nodded his head approvingly, while a look of satisfaction came to his face.

"Just the thing," he muttered. "It looks as if fortune was working on my side. A young vagrant whom nobody knows, and who can be bought body and soul for three good meals and a dollar in his pocket. And if he suspects anything he can he got rid of and not missed."

There was a sinister curl to his lips as he leaned from the carriage and gave the sleeping boy a sharp touch on the ankle with his whip lash.

The boy muttered in his sleep, drew up his leg, and slumbered on.

With an impatient movement, the gentleman now applied the whip, with a severe cut to his hand.

The lad jerked his arm away, groaned, turned over, and opened his eyes.

"Let me 'lone," he muttered. "'Tain't grub time yit."

"The supper bell has just rung," replied the gentleman, with a laugh.

The sleeper by this time had got his wits about him. He sat upright, rubbed his eyes, and stared at the speaker.

"Dunno as it's much odds ter me," he grumbled. "Ain't got my name on ther books. Reckon as how I'll have ter make my supper on crab apples and ditch water, if I kin find any."

The gentleman looked him over from head to foot. The boy had a stupid aspect, as he sat there not yet wide-awake.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Jerry Jarman," came the prompt reply.

"What's yourn?"

"I don't see that it matters much what mine is," answered the man, with an offended air.

"Maybe you don't think it's much account," rejoined the boy. "Anyhow, give an' take's a good game. I ain't ashamed o' my handle."

"My name is Guilbert Morford," replied the gentleman, who did not quite like the turn that Jerry had given to the subject. "Not that it is any of your business. Who are you, anyhow? What are you doing here? What's your business?"

"None o' your business," retorted Jerry. "If yer want to know who I am, I've told yer I'm Jerry Jarman. What I'm doin' here is, I'm a-settin' here. What I'm arter is, I'm arter makin' a fortune outer six cents capital."

"You seem to be a wide-awake lad. What part of the country are you from?"

"Ain't from no part o' ther country. I was borned and kicked up in ther city. Come out yere kaze ther's too many polerticians and speculators in old York, as snatch up all ther snacks. Ain't no openin' ter make a decent livin' in that there caboose. That's how I come ter dig out yere, with a bundle o' fixin's and an empty pocket, jist ter hunt up grub."

"You don't seem to have had any better luck in the country than in the city."

"Found 'bout 'nough ter eat and drink, but ain't added nothin' ter my capital," admitted Jerry. "Folks yere all want a chap ter take

hold o' ther pitchfork or ther plow-handle, and that ain't my lay."

"What is yer lay?"

"S'pose I mought git in somethin' at blackin' boots, or sellin' papers, or runnin' errands, or sich like."

"You won't find those lines of business to pay in the country."

"I'm gittin' too big fur 'em ter pay in the city. That's how I had ter peg out. But I don't know no more 'bout plowin' or hoin' thun a cat knows 'bout parsnips."

"There are other things you can do, I suppose. How would you like to wait on a sick man? To give him his medicines, and take him his meals, and act as a kind of nurse?"

The boy looked quickly, and fixed his eyes on the face of the questioner with a hopeful gaze.

"Ain't in earnest, mister?"

"Certainly I am."

"Never done nothin' o' the sort, but s'pose I kin. Reckon ther sick chap ain't ter do all ther eatin', and me all ther starvin'?"

"No. You shall have your regular meals, and three dollars a week into the bargain, with something to the back of it if you faithfully do what I tell you."

"I'm yer hoss, then," answered Jerry, springing to his feet. "Seems ter me I'm holler all the way down. Ain't eat 'nough ter swell out a cat fur three good days."

"You shall have enough to eat," answered Mr. Morford, with a peculiar smile, that was not lost to Jerry's sharp eyes. "If you come into my service, I'll take care of you, I promise you that."

"That's hokey. B'en tryin' ter take keer o' myself, and ain't got nothin' ter brag of. Guess I want ter be took keer of a while, jist ter see how it feels."

He picked up his bundle, adjusted the stick that bore it over his shoulder, and turned to his new employer.

"Ready. What's ther trampin' orders?"

"Jump in here. I'll give you a lift."

"Me? In that tony wagon?"

"I ain't ashamed of you if you ain't of me," laughed Mr. Morford. "Climb in."

"All serene! It's your funeral," replied Jerry. "I reckon I ain't goin' back on an invitation. Don't want to hurt your feelings."

He climbed into the wagon without further hesitation, and took a seat beside the gentleman as indifferently as if there were no difference in their appearance.

"You don't ask where I am going to take you."

"Ain't got no 'casion to ax. You've told me a'ready."

"Told you? I certainly told you nothing about it."

"Ye're off yer eggs there, Mr. Morford. You told me you were goin' ter take me ter grub-town. Don't keer a nickel where it is, so ther's roast ducks runnin' loose 'round the streets."

Mr. Morford laughed heartily.

"You are no fool, Jerry," he said.

He grasped the reins and drove rapidly onward. It was down hill here, and the spirited horse moved on at a spanking gait, toward the distant town.

No more words passed between the ill-assorted companions. Mr. Morford seemed fully occupied in attending to his horse. Jerry sat back enjoying the drive, which was one of the first he had ever had.

Yet he could not help thinking as they sped rapidly onward. Nor could he help casting side-glances at his companion. There was something in Mr. Morford's face that the keen-witted boy did not quite like. And his sudden stroke of luck seemed to him too good to be fully trusted.

"Maybe I'm sailin' inter a fox's nest," he thought. "But if I am, I bet Mr. Fox don't chaw me up fer a goose. If I ain't got nothin' else, I've got my eye-teeth cut."

By this time they were near the town. Mr. Morford did not drive into it, however, but turned into a side-road and drove into the gateway of a stylishly-built house some distance outside the town. He drove to the porch of the mansion and sprung to the ground.

"This is our stopping-place, my lad. Jump down."

Jerry did so, first flinging his bundle out to the porch.

Mr. Morford hitched his horse and led the way into the house. A servant stood just within.

"Take this boy to the kitchen," he ordered, "and give him his supper. Then bring him to me in the library."

He walked on, leaving Jerry with the servant.

The boy picked up his bundle, as if it was too precious to be left out of his sight, while his face beamed with satisfaction.

"Tell yer what, boss," he remarked, "Mr. Morford's got good idears. Hope yer won't set me 'fore a roast ox, 'caze I don't want ter eat quite that much jist now. But I wouldn't mind tacklin' a fricasseeed sheep, or some sich little snack."

The servant laughed as he led the hungry lad to the kitchen.

CHAPTER II.

AN AWKWARD NURSE.

IN a room on the second floor of the mansion to which the young wanderer had been brought, lay a sick man who seemed on the very point of death. He had evidently once been a handsome man, but his face was now so pinched and pale that all his good looks were gone, and it seemed as if there were not an ounce of life left in his whole body.

Yet his eyes were bright, and there was an expression about his mouth that showed that he had once been a man of vim and energy. A table by his bedside was covered with medicine-bottles, glasses, and the other requisites of a sick-room.

The apartment was kept unpleasantly warm, and the windows heavily curtained, so that the sunlight had some difficulty in making its way into the darkened room.

The invalid lay tossing uneasily on his bed, with an occasional low groan, while Mr. Morford stood by the bedside, looking down on him with a face expressive of pity.

In the rear sat Jerry, coiled upon a chair under which he had deposited his precious bundle. There was a look on his face as if he did not quite like the state of affairs.

"Are you feeling any easier now, George?" asked Mr. Morford.

"No," answered the invalid, in a faint and querulous voice.

"I am sorry for that. I hoped that last medicine would do you good. I came in to tell you that I have discharged that stupid fellow that you disliked so much as a nurse."

"What did you do that for?" cried the invalid pettishly. "And without ever asking me?"

"Because I saw how he troubled you. I have brought you a new nurse, with more wit and brains. Come up here, Jerry. My sick cousin wants to see you."

The sick man did not seem as if he wanted to see anybody. He flung himself impatiently away, with more strength than one would have expected, while his pinched face wore a look of vexation.

But this pettish fit lasted but an instant, when he turned back, and fixed his large, bright eyes on the face of the lad.

It was a keen and penetrating glance, that gave Jerry a queer feeling, as if he was being gazed at by the eyes of a ghost.

"What have you brought me this scarecrow for? He is a bundle of rags," exclaimed the sick man. "Take him away! Take him away!"

"Them rags ain't me, mister," declared Jerry indignantly. "I'm inside them rags, and what 'er is o' me is solid, now you bet! I'm a boss rom the word go. Can't say as I keer 'bout layin' dry nuss. If you don't want me, I don't want you. So we're quits, and I'll toddle."

This bold defiance and independence attracted the attention of the invalid. He looked again more closely at the boy, seeming to take in his every feature. Mr. Morford stood by, a little uneasily.

After his momentary scrutiny the invalid lay back helplessly on his pillow, with a deep moan.

"I suppose I'll have to take him," he said intently but pettishly. "But I don't thank you for sending away the other without consulting me. That wasn't like you, Guilbert. Take him away and find him some decent clothes. I won't be waited on by a scarecrow."

These words seemed spoken with great difficulty, as if the momentary excitement had exhausted the patient's strength.

"I am sorry if I have hurt your feelings, George," said Mr. Morford. "I meant it for the best, and thought I would please you. Do try and compose yourself; you are too impatient. Come, Jerry, I must see if I can't dress you more to Mr. Benson's taste."

He turned and left the room, followed by Jerry. Had he looked back he would have seen the sick man partly raised on his elbow, and gazing after him with a face in which cunning and anger were mixed.

He even raised one hand and shook it at him with a threatening gesture. Evidently there was life yet in the sick man's body.

As to Jerry's feelings during this interview we can say but little. He had felt pity for the poor invalid, but was not very anxious to take on the business of nurse. It did not seem to agree with his roving disposition.

But the prospect of a decent suit of clothes and three regular meals a day was not to be thrown overboard. He had been half starved so long that he wanted badly to fill up. And it had been years since he had worn a whole coat, or a hat that was not ventilated.

"Guess I'll tackle the job, Mr. Morford," he remarked. "Ain't had no eddication that way, but I reckon I kin pour medicines inter him, an' quiet him down when he gits inter his tantrums. Hope them there new clothes is goin' ter fit," he continued anxiously.

"I have a suit that was made for a boy of your size," replied Mr. Morford. "Come this way."

In an hour afterward Jerry was so transformed that he would not have known himself in a looking-glass.

He had been given a good warm bath, and felt as clean as a new pin. And he was attired in a neatly fitting suit of blue cloth that set off his trim figure to great advantage.

His hair was neatly combed, his face scrubbed till it shone, and altogether no one would have known him for the ragged and untidy tramp of the day before.

"Jolly, if I don't feel scrumptious," he declared, as he admired himself from head to foot in a mirror. "Didn't know I were half so good-lookin'. Tell you what, Mr. Morford, if you've got any soft-hearted gals round these diggin's, you'd best not let 'em git their eyes on this coon. Don't want ter break nobody's heart, nor nothin' o' that sort."

"You are a conceited young rascal," laughed Mr. Morford. "Sit down now, and stop your nonsense, till I let you know what are to be your duties."

Jerry obeyed, yet he could not keep his eyes off his new clothes while Mr. Morford was talking. He was full of satisfaction from his necktie to his shoes, and his new cap of soft felt seemed to him a perfect gem of beauty.

His duties, as laid down by Mr. Morford, were to attend to everything necessary in the sick-room, to give the patient his medicines, and take him his food, and to strictly obey Mr. Morford's directions in everything.

He was to sleep in a small room adjoining the sick-chamber, and to keep the door ajar, so that he could hear if the patient should need anything in the night.

"Tell yer one thing," confessed Jerry. "I'm a boss of a sleeper. Tain't in that sick man's boots to wake me up, arter I git snoozin'. Reckon I'll have ter tie a string ter my little toe, and let him pull."

"That's a good suggestion, Jerry. I had to use a horse-whip to bring you to, yesterday. Are you ready for duty?"

"You bet."

"It will not be for long, my lad. My poor cousin is a very sick man. He has been slowly sinking for a month, and it will be a miracle if he lasts a week longer. He may drop off any day. It is a dreadful affliction to me, and I hardly know how to bear it."

His face was turned away from Jerry, but his voice was very mournful. But the looking-glass near which they stood gave the boy a clear reflection of his face. To his surprise what he saw there was anything but grief. There was a look of tigerish duplicity on that sinister countenance.

Jerry gave a slight start of surprise. He began to scent a double game in the wind. Was there some ugly work behind all this fair show? Was the sick man being dealt with foully?

"I'm goin' to keep my optics open," he said to himself. "I don't quite buckle to this chap, and if he's playin' ugly on that poor sick customer, I'm ther boss ter block his game. That's me, Jerry Jarman."

But none of this resolution appeared on Jerry's face. He dropped his usual smart look, and seemed very simple and docile as he followed his employer to the sick-room. If there was a game to be played, Jerry could take his hand in it.

The invalid was propped up with a pillow when they entered the room. His face looked more cadaverous than before, and there seemed to be less than a day's life in his wasted body.

Yet his eyes appeared sharper and brighter than ever. They stood out from his pinched face, in which they glittered like two diamonds. The look of those eyes gave Jerry a queer sensa-

tion, as if there was something uncanny and unwholesome in their depths.

He looked the boy over from head to foot with a critical gaze.

"That will do," he murmured, feebly. "Now he is more respectable."

"Of course, I wish to do everything for your comfort and pleasure, George," said Mr. Morford, smoothly. "I am sure this young man will make you a faithful and attentive nurse. He has been instructed in his duties, and I hope you will find him agreeable. Are you feeling any better to-day, my poor fellow?"

"Worse," groaned the invalid.

"I am so sorry. If I could but do anything, anything. Alas, I am helpless before your strange disease."

After some more remarks of pity and condolence, delivered in a very mournful tone, Mr. Morford left the room.

He was followed by Jerry with a suspicious glance. The keen ears of the boy had recognized something strained and artificial in those mournful accents.

"If ther old 'un ain't a fox, then I'm a fool," he concluded. "He wants Mr. Benson ter peg out. And if I ain't blinder nor a jackass he's a-helpin' him along. I wouldn't trust that there coon half as fur as I could sling a meetin'-house."

The invalid lay back on his pillow in silence. His eyes moved uneasily around the room, occasionally falling on Jerry, and giving him a return of that odd sensation.

A half-hour of this grew very tiresome to the active boy. He had never kept quiet so long in his life before, except when he was asleep.

He sprung up at length in desperation, and looked at the clock.

"I've got ter do somethin' or bu'st," he said to himself. "'Tain't quite medicine time yet, but I reckon I'll guv him some anyhow. It's ter be the bottle with ther blue label next. Dunno how much, but reckon 'bout a spoonful won't hurt."

The unaccustomed nurse took up the bottle in question and poured out a teaspoonful, awkwardly spilling as much more on the floor.

The invalid watched him, with a queer look on his face.

"Wake up, Mr. Benson," said Jerry. "Grub time now, I reckon. Ye're ter swaller this and git well. Them's the orders."

"Do you want to murder me, you rascal?" exclaimed the patient, in a tone so loud and fierce that Jerry started and shook all the medicine from his spoon to the floor.

"If ye're goin' ter bu'st out that way I'll guv up," he muttered. "There's a hull spoonful wasted, and the bottle's 'most empty."

"Can't you read, you villain?"

"You bet! If the words ain't too long."

"Then read the label on that bottle."

Jerry read: "Ten drops every three hours, in a half glass of water."

The boy began to get an inkling that something had gone wrong, though he knew no more about medicines than he did about algebra.

"Now listen to me, you reprobate. Put down that bottle, and don't touch it with your awkward fingers again. If I'd taken that spoonful I'd be a dead man now. Do you hear?"

"Kinder," answered Jerry, who could not help noticing that the sick man's voice had suddenly grown very strong.

"Very well. Pour me out a half glass of water from the pitcher."

Jerry obeyed.

"Now take this vial and carefully drop three drops into the water."

He produced a small vial from somewhere under the bed-clothes. Much astonished at this strange proceeding Jerry did as directed. The sick man watched him sharply, to see that he did not go beyond the three drops.

Then he took the glass from his hands and swallowed its contents, with an air of satisfaction.

"Give me back the vial."

He hid it again under the bed-clothing, watching Jerry's face closely as he did so. He continued to watch him until the boy grew uneasy.

"Where did you come from?" the invalid at length asked.

"Long side the road. Was takin' a snooze when Mr. Morford picked me up."

"What wages is he giving you?"

"Three dollars a week and grub."

"Suppose I should promise you ten dollars a week without grub, will you do just as I say?"

Jerry looked at him in astonishment. What did all this mean? The invalid was certainly not half as sick as he had been.

"I'm a straight feller," he muttered.

"You don't want to play tool to a rascal, do you?"

"Nary time; I ain't that kind."

"Then suppose I tell you a secret. Will you keep it for ten dollars a week?"

"Let it out, mister. I'm yer boss."

"In the first place, then, your new master is a villain."

"Jist as I was a-thinkin' myself."

"And, secondly, I'm not as sick a man as everybody thinks."

"Reckon I've got that idea in too."

"But, in the third place, I am on the point of death. I shall die at ten o'clock to-morrow night, and be buried two days afterward."

To this startling declaration Jerry made no answer. He was quite beyond speech, and stood staring at the speaker with open eyes and mouth. The face of the latter was perfectly serious and steady. There was evidently no joke intended.

He again extended his hand from the bed. There was a bank-note between the fingers.

"Take that," he said; "it is your first week's wages in advance. Do you faithfully promise to keep all you see and hear in this room a solemn secret?"

"The peggin' out and all?" queried the astonished boy.

"Every word."

"All right. I've got that nailed down."

"Very well. I wish to sleep now for a while. Take care you don't disturb me."

There was no danger of that. Jerry had enough to think of to keep him quiet for the next hour.

CHAPTER III.

MORE MYSTERY IN THE WIND.

SOUND sleeper as Jerry Jarman usually was, we cannot say that he slept very soundly that night. In the first place, his bed was too comfortable. He had been used to sleeping on the soft side of a plank or on a cobble-stone mattress.

In the second place, the room was too warm. In the third place, he could not get the sick man and those dangerous medicine-bottles out of his mind.

But what troubled him most was the air of mystery that surrounded him. The strange events of the day kept running through his mind. And strangest of all was the sick man's declaration that he intended to die at a certain hour of the next day.

"Looks as if he meant it, too," muttered Jerry. "He's jist one o' them contrary coons that'd cut his throat jist ter spite folks. Wonder if he thinks I've got a soft snap, and he's goin' ter cheat me out on't? Jist my luck if he does."

He fell asleep at length, but his sleep was no more comfortable. In his dreams he saw a room full of eyes, that bored into him like gimlets, each of them as bright as a diamond. And sick men seemed dying all around him, with no reason for it except pure contrariness.

"It's jist cussedness," exclaimed the boy, waking up. "He's a-doin' of it to spite me. Said he didn't like me when he fust see'd me. Anyhow, he planked down lively. Oughtn't ter peg out till I've arnt my week's wages. You bet, if he does, I'm a-goin' to salt down that tanner."

Daybreak found Jerry not much refreshed by his night's sleep. He was glad enough to see the sun. The sick man was still dozing, but his face did not look so corpse-like now as when he was awake.

The young nurse moved quietly around the room, putting it to rights with more care than might have been expected of him.

He then made his way to the kitchen, where he found his breakfast ready and waiting. Here Jerry was at home. This part of his duty was entirely agreeable, and there was no danger of his neglecting it.

"How's Mr. Benson this morning?" asked the cook, as she watched the boy with a smile on her greasy face.

"Sick," answered Jerry between two bites.

"That's no news. You might have saved your breath."

"Goin' to die," continued Jerry.

"That's no news, either."

"He's fast asleep, then. That's news, ain't it? Can't ax him nothin' 'bout his insides till he wakes up."

"You're a surly and ill-natured young vagabond," said the cook angrily.

"No I ain't," declared Jerry. "It's jist 'cause I'm too good-natured that I ain't made my fortune long ago. I'm b'ilin' over with good-nater."

"Maybe it all boiled over before you came here," suggested the cook.

"A feller can't eat an' talk at onc't," replied Jerry. "Leastway, I can't. Been so long since I've had a free blow at grub, that I'm sort o' holler. Got ter fill up 'fore I kin talk. Tell yer what, ma'am, you do git up things jist scrumptuous. Reckon I ain't left much 'cept bones. Now peg ahead. I'm ready."

"I'd think so. You've got a tongue as long as a flag-pole, when you do get started."

"And as limber as a cat's tail. Yer ain't tellin' me no news."

"Hold up, now. I'm getting Mr. Benson's breakfast ready. You're to take it up to him. But, first of all, you must take it to Mr. Morford in the breakfast-room. He won't let nothing go up until he has seen it."

"Ain't he kinder partik'lar?"

"It's the doctor's orders. They have to be very careful what they give him to eat."

She continued to prepare the invalid's morning repast, plying Jerry with all sorts of questions as she did so.

We cannot say that she got much satisfaction out of him. He did not forget his promise to Mr. Benson, and took care to give no hint of the strange things he had already learned.

"You're not as bright as I thought you were, if that's all you know," she said, discontentedly. "Now here's Mr. Benson's breakfast. Take it first to Mr. Morford. See that you make no mistake about that."

"I'll try," answered Jerry, with his tongue in his cheek. "It's jist as you say. I was kinder stupid. Ain't got no more brains nor you could put in a pepper-bottle. Can't expect ter git gravy out o' dry bones."

"Get out, you rascal!" cried the cook, with a laugh. "You ain't as big a fool as you let on, drat you!"

Jerry left the room grinning.

"You kin keep on pumpin', ma'am," he said, to himself. "But if you think you're goin' ter fetch water lively out o' this here well, ye're off yer eggs, that's all."

He made his way to the breakfast room, where he found Mr. Morford alone, reading the morning paper.

"Ye're the sick gentleman's grub," answered Jerry, planting the neatly-arranged waiter before him. "Got kitchen orders to fetch it to you fust."

"That's right," said Mr. Morford, pleasantly, as he bent over the plate and examined its contents. "Boiled eggs. That is against orders. Take them away."

Jerry took the dish of eggs handed him, and placed them on the opposite table.

When he turned back Mr. Morford's hand was just leaving the waiter.

"That will do now," he said. "You may take it in. Is Mr. Benson awake?"

"Wasn't when I left."

"He probably is now. He keeps up a very fair appetite for so sick a man. Go up now, or you will find him out of temper."

Jerry took up his burden without reply, and proceeded to the sick chamber. He had seen nothing out of the way in this performance, yet he was so suspicious of Mr. Morford that he suspected something wrong.

As that gentleman had said, Mr. Benson was awake, and a little impatient when Jerry entered the room.

"Where have you been?" he demanded. "You have my breakfast? That's right. Bring it here."

He drew himself partly upright in the bed, and laid the waiter of food before him. There was a look upon his face whose meaning Jerry could not fathom.

To the boy's surprise he saw the invalid lift the dishes one by one, look at them closely with his sharp eyes, and apply them to his nose.

One of them he laid aside—a delicately cooked piece of chicken.

He looked meaningly at Jerry.

"You have not forgotten that you are pledged to keep everything secret?"

"If they put down a forty hoss-power pump inter my inside they won't draw nothin' outer this coon," replied the boy.

"Then I want you to slip that piece of chicken slyly into the slop tub. Don't say a word. And don't eat it yourself. It isn't fit to eat. You unders'and?"

"I kin see a hole through a ladder," muttered Jerry.

"Very well. Then I will make my breakfast."

He ate the remainder of the food with a good appetite, watching Jerry out of the corner of his eye as the latter emptied the chicken into a

piece of paper, folded it up, and deposited it in his pocket.

"That's clever," nodded the invalid. "Take these plates away now and keep mum."

The nurse obeyed. Leaving his burden in the kitchen he took the opportunity to slip into the yard and to throw the rejected food into the slops, burying it out of sight.

Jerry began to feel better satisfied with his situation. It was not turning out such a stupid affair as he had expected. And it looked as if there might be lively times ahead.

About ten o'clock the doctor came. He had an interview with Mr. Morford before entering the sick-room, heard his reasons for the change of nurses, and questioned Jerry.

"The boy will do," he said. "The other one did not quite please me, I admit. How is your cousin this morning?"

"Worse, I fear," replied Mr. Morford, mournfully. "He is a very sick man, doctor."

"Very. I can only tide him on. I fear there is no hope of recovery."

He led the way to the sick-chamber, followed by Mr. Morford and Jerry.

Here he felt the pulse of the invalid, asked him some questions, and carefully examined him.

Mr. Benson seemed dreadfully feeble. His voice could hardly be heard when he answered, and his face looked doubly thin.

"Come, come, Benson, you give way too much," said the doctor, with a pretence at cheerfulness. "We'll fetch you out of this yet. Trust me for that."

"I know—you will," said the invalid, very feebly. "You'll fetch—me out—in a coffin, and—very soon."

"Ha! ha ha!" laughed the doctor. "He's not a dead man yet. He's got life enough to joke. If anybody brings a coffin here I'll kick him out, I promise you. I must change your medicine, I see. You're getting along too fast. What's this? You haven't taken all this?"

He held up the bottle with the blue label.

"Reckon I'm in fur that, doctor," acknowledged Jerry. "I spilt a lot o' that stuff, tryin' ter measure it."

"It is better on the carpet than inside the patient," remarked the doctor, as he wrote a prescription. "Have this made up at once. Don't give him any more of the other."

After a few more cheering words he left the room, in company with Mr. Morford.

"It looks bad, doctor," said the latter.

"Sliding down hill rapidly," acknowledged the doctor. "It is one of those confounded mysterious cases which it is so difficult to get at. Bright's disease, I take it. Yet there are some symptoms that are very queer. I fear the poor fellow is right. He will go out, and very soon, in a coffin."

"I fear so—I fear so," answered Mr. Morford, with a sad shake of the head.

He shook the doctor's hand very impressively as the latter left, while his face was as solemn as a graveyard.

Yet his gloomy look vanished, as he turned away, and his face lighted up.

"It is working," he muttered. "It is working. And no one dreams."

He was slightly mistaken in his last remark. Some one did dream. And rather more than dream.

Mr. Benson seemed to grow feebler hour by hour that day—at least while Mr. Morford was in the room.

But when he was alone with his youthful nurse this feebleness disappeared, his face filled out, and his voice grew suddenly stronger.

Jerry shook his head as he sat looking at the invalid, who had drawn his shoulders up on the pillow. There were queer thoughts passing through the boy's brain.

For an hour neither had spoken a word. The boy could keep silent no longer. Those glittering eyes of the invalid troubled him.

"S'pose you've giv it up," he said abruptly.

"Given what up?" queried Mr. Benson.

"That peggin' out dodge. That's all gammon, you know. Jist got up for a sell on me."

Mr. Benson laughed. The laugh startled Jerry; it was strong enough for a well man. It sounded strangely, coming from those thin lips.

"Thought you'd giv it up when ye come to think on't," continued the boy. "A coffin's sich a jolly awkward sort of a overcoat, you know."

Mr. Benson's face was grave again.

"My death will take place at ten o'clock to-night," he repeated.

"Oh, come now. That's taffy."

"It is the solemn truth, my boy. I am not thinking of a joke. In two days from now

I will be buried. I know that is as long as Guilbert Morford will keep my corpse in the house. My burial will take place in the stone vault in the cemetery near this town—the Benson vault."

"Got it all down fine," muttered Jerry.

"As the time is drawing near," continued the invalid, "there are some necessary preliminaries which I must arrange. I am going to trust you, my boy, with a matter of great importance. Can I depend upon you?"

He fixed his eyes with a glittering sharpness on Jerry's face.

"Can't always 'pend on myself," muttered Jerry.

"I am going to make it worth your while to be silent and faithful. How much money have you ever had at one time in your life?"

"Got the most now. That what you guv me last night."

"Suppose you had five hundred dollars in one lump. What would you do with it?"

"Me? Five hundred dollars?" cried the astounded boy.

"Yes. I am in earnest."

"Tell you what I'd do. I'd buy the Bowery Theater square out, and make ther actors play right through ter me. Wouldn't let another coon in. Next thing, I reckon I'd buy a steamboat, and go a-fishin'."

The sick man laughed again at Jerry's odd idea of the value of five hundred dollars. It seemed a million in the boy's eyes.

"Listen to me now," remarked the invalid impressively. "If you obey me in every particular you shall have that sum of money. If you fail in any respect you will risk the loss of it all."

"Say what it is," cried Jerry. "I'll do 'most anything 'cept kicking down the East River Bridge. Won't undertake that job."

"What I want done you can easily do. Two days after I am buried—that is, two days from to-day—you must go to the cemetery at midnight."

"How 'bout ghosts?" cried Jerry, hastily.

"Never mind the ghosts. There are no such things. You will go to the vault in which I am buried, and open the iron door."

"Lawsee!" cried the astounded boy. "How's I ter do that? With a crowbar?"

"With this key. It is a duplicate of the one kept by the family." He drew a large key from under the bed-clothes and handed it to his astonished attendant. "When the vault is open you are to pry off the lid of my coffin. Or take out the screws. You must provide yourself with a screw-driver, a hammer and chisel."

"What then?" demanded Jerry.

"Then you will have earned your five hundred dollars. If you fail in any particular, or breathe a word of this to a living being, you will not get a penny. Do you understand?" He transfixed the boy with his keen eyes.

"Got it down fine," muttered Jerry.

"Do you accept the office?"

"You bet I do. Don't keer if ther's a graveyard full o' ghosts, neither."

"Do that, my boy, and your fortune's made."

The invalid fell back on his pillow, as if thoroughly exhausted by this conversation.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. BENSON KEEPS HIS CONTRACT.

JERRY had a secret that was a very heavy weight for a boy of his size to carry. The sick man watched him sharply, particularly when Mr. Morford was in the room.

He finally nodded his head approvingly.

"You will do, my boy," he remarked. "Remember, there's your fortune in it. If you fail in any particular you will be a beggar as long as you live. If you do just as I say, you can buy a theater and a steamboat."

"Bet yer bottom dollar I'll do it. And won't I make them actors howl when they come ter the killin' parts? Won't hire none 'cept 'e kicks a hole in ther carpet when he pegs out. None o' your kid glove coons for me."

Mr. Benson laughed again.

"Sit up close here. I want to give you some further instructions," he said.

The talk that followed lasted for a half-hour. There was a show of color in the sick man's face, and his voice was strong and full. He seemed to have ten years of life in him.

The conversation over, he directed Jerry to mix him ten drops from his private vial. The medicine ordered by the doctor he had not touched.

This was hardly swallowed before he became deathly pale again, and fell back on his pillow intensely feeble.

When the doctor entered on his afternoon visit the patient was gasping and voiceless. The worthy physician shook his head gravely on leaving the room.

"He seems on his last legs," he said.

As for Jerry, he was at a dead loss what to make of all this. Here was a man dying one minute and living the next, arranging for his own funeral as coolly as if he could die to order, and making plans for a resurrection with the same coolness. As to the latter, the boy was yet a little in the dark. He was to take off the coffin lid, but he knew nothing of what was to happen afterward. That was as far as his instructions went.

"If he's goin' ter play the ghost game on me, I bet I hit him with the hammer," muttered the boy. "Ain't goin' ter be skeered outer ten years' growth fur nary slab-sided ghost. 'Spect what he wants is ter haunt old Morford. But, he's got ter pony down them there spondulicks, or I'll lock him in ag'in, and let him howl inside his bones. Can't play yer gum games on this chicken, ghost or no ghost."

That day drew to its end, and night came on, very much to Jerry's uneasiness. He could not help hoping that it all might prove a joke, but Mr. Benson was so quiet and earnest that it was not sure but that he meant all he said.

"Wish I'd never see'd old Morford," muttered the discontented boy. "Dunno but I'd sooner plow and hoe than this sort o' thing. Don't say as it ain't fun, but 'tain't jist my kind o' fun."

He was interrupted by a call in a faint voice from Mr. Benson.

"Come here, Jerry," he ordered.

Jerry obeyed.

The sick man had raised himself on one elbow, and held in his hand the vial which he had kept concealed.

His hand also held a fluttering bank-note, which he extended toward the astonished boy.

"Take that," he said. "It is a twenty dollar bill. I give it to you on account of your five hundred. Put it, with your other money in some safe place. You may be searched. Now tell me. Do you fully remember your instructions?"

"If you'd burnt 'em inter me I couldn't have 'em down finer."

"And are you prepared to carry them out to the letter, no matter what happens?"

"If they lock me up in the States Prison I'll climb out through ther bars an do it. When this boss says a thing he doesn't mean somethin' else."

"That's clever. There's one more thing. Do you promise to hold your tongue?"

"If they git anything outer me they'll have ter blast it out. If they guv me dynamite fur pound-cake, and set it off inside me, I can't say what mought come out. But they won't find me no leaky bucket."

"Keep to that, my lad, I fancy I can trust you. Now take this, and mind that you strictly obey my last directions."

He handed Jerry the small vial, which was half full of a yellow liquid.

"You are to pour out this time, not ten drops but a tea spoonful, and mix in a glass of water. Do that carefully now, and set it here on the table."

Jerry obeyed these directions with great care, the invalid intently watching him.

"Now you must take this vial, with its remaining contents, and conceal it safely within your clothing. Keep it as carefully as if it were gold or jewels, for it is precious as diamonds. When you have taken off the coffin lid and revealed my dead face you must wet your handkerchief from this fluid, and spread it over my nose and mouth. Do you understand?"

"Got it all in," muttered Jerry.

"And can I count on your strict obedience?"

"Yer ain't goin' ter play no skeery game on me? No ghost dodge nor nothin'?"

"Not at all."

"Then I'll do it. Right square up ter ther notch. Nary fail."

"Good-by, then, my boy. If you fail to obey my directions, I'll haunt you for the rest of your life. Remember that."

Fixing a penetrating look on the face of the boy, he took up the prepared goblet and slowly drained it of its contents, without removing his eyes for an instant from the countenance of his youthful nurse.

A moment passed. The goblet fell from his hand and was caught by the alarmed boy. Then the invalid dropped back on the bed, as white as the sheets upon which he lay, his jaw dropping, his eyes opening with a glassy stare.

Jerry stood watching him with pale face and

trembling limbs. He had never been scared so badly in his life before.

It was now nine o'clock. The night without was a dreary one. The wind had risen and was howling round the corners of the building. It soured frightfully through the trees. A dash of rain came against the window-panes. To Jerry's excited fancy it seemed as if a legion of ghosts were abroad.

The sick-chamber was dimly lighted, but the light fell on that deathlike face with its staring eyes and sunken jaw.

One hand lay outside the counterpane, and the fingers were feebly moving. Mr. Benson was yet alive, yet he looked so much like a dead man, and the shadows played so phantom-like in the corners of the room, that it was more than the boy's nerves could stand.

He turned the light on full, and then retreated to his own sleeping-room, where he flung himself down on the bed.

"Ain't no use gittin' inter a conniption," he muttered. "He weren't to die till ten o'clock, and if he kicks the bucket 'fore that time it's clean ag'in' ther contract. I ain't goin' ter stir a peg till ten o'clock strikes, and if he's dead then, I'll howl. It's a mighty aggrawatin' sitivation fur a chap as ain't been brung up ter it."

He lay there thinking over the strange bargain he had made, and recalling the instructions he had received, point by point, so as to impress them firmly on his mind.

Every sound that came from the adjoining room, the rustle of a curtain as the wind made its way through a crack in the window, the pattering of the rain, all made him shudder. He was earning his money already.

But he got his greatest start when a clock in an adjoining room began slowly to strike the hour. One by one, clear and solemn, came the strokes, up to the number of ten.

The boy looked up in affright. He fancied he heard a queer sound and saw a strange figure in the adjoining room. But a moment convinced him that he was wrong. All was deathly silent.

"Reckon I've got ter face ther music," he said. "Time's up. Got ter start ther hand organ, and make the monkeys dance."

It was not very pleasant, to go into that still chamber, with its frightful occupant. But Jerry was no coward when it came to the pinch. He walked steadily into the room, very glad that he had left the gas at full head.

A still white form lay stretched upon the bed, tenfold more pallid than ever, as it seemed to the excited boy. There was no movement now in the hand, no blood in the visage, no light in the eye. To all appearance the sick man had died, as he had promised to do.

Jerry forced himself to lift the fallen hand. It was cold as ice. He felt the pulse, but there was no movement there. On releasing the arm it fell back like lead.

It was as much as the boy's nerves could stand. He kept his word. He howled.

Running to the door he flung it wide open, and made such a noise in that house as it had not often heard.

"Hello, everybody!" he roared. "Roll up! Tumble up! He's kicked the bucket! He's dug out! He's a dead goner! Hello! Hello!"

By this time doors were opening and frightened voices were demanding what had happened.

"Wake up! Mr. Benson's pegged out! Dead as a door nail! Want yer all ter come to time. Ain't goin' ter stay yere without company. Wake up Mr. Morford, somebody."

If they had all been dead Jerry's outcry was enough to bring them to life again. Ere many minutes Mr. Morford and all the other inmates of the house were in the room.

"Here he is. Said he were goin' to peg out, and he kept square ter his contract."

"Said he was?" demanded Mr. Morford, with an inquiring look.

"Jist so," declared Jerry, who had let out too much in his excitement. "Bout an hour ago. Felt it comin', I reckon."

Mr. Morford walked up to the bed, and stood looking down on the face of the dead man. He remained thus without moving for several minutes.

Then he turned to the servants, who stood in a frightened group behind him, staring at the lifeless form.

Mr. Morford's face was very pale. There was more than grief, there was the excitement of terror, hardly repressed, in his look.

"I fear my poor cousin is no more," he said in a solemn tone. "Some one hasten for the doctor. You, James. Ring him up, and bid

him come without delay. We must know if this be really death."

In a half-hour the doctor was there. A glance at the face was enough for his experienced eyes. But he touched the wrist, and tried the other tests.

"It has proved as Mr. Benson said," he remarked. "When he leaves this room it will be in a coffin. He is stone dead."

In an hour afterward the room was left with a watcher, and the rest of the family had returned to their rooms, though perhaps not to sleep.

Jerry was the only one who was able to sleep soundly that night. He was completely worn out with excitement, and slumbered like a log till the break of day.

Yet to him what had happened was more than to any other member of the household. It concealed a mystery that was known to him alone.

CHAPTER V.

THE FUNERAL AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

Two days had passed since the night of Mr. Benson's death. It had turned out as he predicted. He was to be buried that day. Mr. Morford declared that it was not safe to keep the corpse in the house. He had died of a mysterious disease, which might be catching. The whole family might take it.

Jerry was still an inmate of the house. He had nothing to do however, but to eat, drink, and enjoy himself. He had earned a day or two's rest.

On the morning of the day in which the funeral was to take place the boy had made his way into the town. Here he wandered around for awhile, taking an observation of the place.

Finally he made his way into the grocery store, on an errand which had been given him by the cook.

The morning was a chilly one, and there was a fire in the great stove, around which a group of persons were gathered. They were busy talking. Jerry paused in his errand, on hearing familiar names.

"Durned queer thing that about George Benson," said a countrified looking fellow.

"Why, yes. He's always been a strong and hearty man. And nobody seems to know what ailed him. It's my notion he ought to been cut open and examined."

"Maybe Guil Morford didn't keer to have that done. Seems to me he's sort o' hurrying up the funeral. Looks as if there was something besides the corpse he wants to bury."

"What do you mean?" asked a stout personage, behind the stove. "Those are ugly hints. You've got no right to say such things except you can back them up."

"S'pose not," admitted the first speaker. "But it's queer that Doctor Brown ain't been able to see through the complaint. He wants to make a *post mortem*, but Morford wouldn't listen to it."

"Don't wonder at that," said another. "I wouldn't let any of my family be chopped up, to please a doctor."

"Morford's easy enough, to be sure," replied another. "He's got nothing to gain by foul play."

"Not as easy as you think, maybe. He's been speculating I hear, and is in a deuce of a tight place."

"They say there's fifty thousand life insurance on Benson," remarked another speaker. "And in favor of Guil Morford."

There was a general shaking of hands at these words. It was very evident that there was suspicion abroad.

Jerry listened intently. There was an eye-opener in all this for him. He was putting this and that together rapidly in his quick brain.

"I don't know what George Benson wanted that for," said the stout man. "He was well fixed. They say that his property in Pennsylvania is worth a cool hundred thousand."

"Excuse me, gentlemen," remarked the proprietor of the store. "I it's all one to you suppose you change the subject. I don't like these hints thrown out in my establishment. And I've a notion you're making a mountain out of a molehill. Anyhow I won't have ugly remarks made here about one of my customers."

The gossips subsided at this reproof and changed the subject. Jerry got what he had come after and left the store. He had been given new matter for thought. The plot was deepening.

At two o'clock that afternoon the funeral took place. The weather had kept so cool that there had been no need to put the corpse on ice. And there was not about it the least sign of decay.

Only that there was no pulse, and the face

was snow-white, with the glassy stare of death in the eyes, he might have been taken for a man in a trance.

Everybody remarked on the very natural look of the face, and also on the deep feeling shown by Mr. Morford. The latter gentleman, indeed, seemed inconsolable about his cousin's death.

"I wouldn't have thought Guil Morford would have taken it so hard," remarked one of the funeral guests in a low voice to his companion. "I always thought there was no love lost between him and Benson. It takes death to bring out a man's true feelings."

"Yes," was the answer. "And have you noticed Doctor Brown? He seems confoundedly puzzled. I believe he is out of sorts because he wasn't allowed to cut the corpse open."

"That's the way with doctors. They always want to know what's inside a man. According to my notion, as long as a man's dead it don't make a bit of difference what ailed him. It won't bring him back to know that."

"Except there was foul play," hinted the other.

"Hush. I won't listen to such talk."

All this had not been intended for other ears. But it had been heard by Jerry Jarman, who was standing close by. He walked away, scratching his head doubtfully.

The funeral was well attended. Mr. Benson had been highly respected as one of the principal men of the town, and the citizens turned out by hundreds to follow him to the grave.

He was buried in the Benson vault, according to the family custom and his own express desire.

This vault was a low, dark, stone-lined cavern, closed by a firm iron door, which, when opened, let out a rank sepulchral smell that gave one a sickening feeling.

The coffin was placed here in a deep niche in the wall, the funeral services said, and the iron doors closed and firmly locked.

To all appearance all was over with Benson. So thought the persons present as they turned slowly and solemnly away. So thought not Jerry Jarman.

He could not forget that he was pledged to return at midnight, two days afterward, unlock those doors, and open that coffin.

The bare thought of it gave him a shudder. He was full of superstition, and had heard countless stories of ghosts in his lifetime. To enter a graveyard at midnight—to descend into that gloomy vault—to open a dead man's coffin—his blood fairly froze in his veins at the idea.

But he had given his solemn promise. He would not go back on that if there were enough specters to eat him up alive. And the money for which he had the dead man's promise! That was worth fighting a legion of ghosts and hobgoblins to gain.

Yet we cannot say that Jerry slept very soundly that night. His sleep was full of dreams, in which dead-men's coffins floated through the air, with corpse-like faces grinning on him through holes in the lids, until he was half-scared out of his wits. He welcomed daylight as he had never done before.

At ten o'clock that morning Mr. Morford sent for him to his office.

He was seated at a desk by the window, busily writing, when Jerry entered.

The inconceivable grief of the day before had passed from his face, and his expression was now quite cheerful.

"S'pose he don't see no use ter play that there sorry dodge 'fore a feller like me," thought Jerry. "Wonder what's in ther wind now?"

"Ah, my lad, you are here!" remarked Mr. Morford, wheeling around in his chair. "You have done well, Jerry, very well. I think you have earned your full week's wages, although you have not been a week in my service."

"Don't mean ter say as ye're goin' ter guv me my walkin'-papers; 'fore the week's up?" demanded Jerry.

"I have no further service for you. You do very well to get a week's pay for four days' work."

"There were a week's grub inter the contract," responded Jerry. "Got ter keep that part o' ther programme. That were my sbeer o' the contract. Can't leave here nohow till arter I've eat my week's grub."

"Oh, I'll let you off that duty."

"Won't be let off. Done the rough part o' the duty, and ain't goin' ter be flung on ther easy part. Nary punkins o' that sort fur this yere pie."

"Oh, come, come. I'll add a dollar to your wages to make up for that. I don't want to be means with you. By the way, Jerry, I want to talk with you for your own good. You are get-

ting to be more than a boy, and should be beginning life in earnest. What plans have you laid out?"

"Nary plan," answered Jerry, easily. "Jist slouchin' round waitin' fur somethin' ter turn up. That's all."

"That won't do. I have taken a fancy to you and won't permit that. I have been thinking about you and laying out plans for you, my boy."

"S'pect you're good fur layin' out plans fur folks as preless to lay out ther own plans," answered Jerry, in a very independent manner.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Mr. Morford, sharply and suspiciously.

"Nothin' much."

"See here, Jerry," he cried, turning full toward him. "I'm told that you have been talking about me, and setting afloat idle rumors."

"That's a lie!" answered Jerry, angrily. "Folks is talkin'. I'll say that. 'Kaze I've heered 'em. But, they ain't got no gab outer this chicken."

"What are they saying?"

"You moughtn't like ter hear it."

"I care nothing for their idle gossip. But I want to know what they're saying."

"They're hintin' as ther's been foul play," acknowledged Jerry, keenly watching the face before him. "They say as nobody but you knowed what was ther matter with Mr. Benson, and that maybe his property and his fifty thousand insurance were the disease as took him off."

Mr. Morford changed color at this plain speaking. He could not help a slight shudder. His eyes dropped for the moment under Jerry's keen look.

"Well, I hope they enjoy it," he said, with a sorry effort at a laugh. "Let them take care they don't get into trouble. What do you think, Jerry? You were with the dead man in his last moments. Did you see anything suspicious?"

It was Jerry's turn now to change color. He faltered out a "No" in answer. But the question had been sprung on him so suddenly that he could not disguise his real sentiments.

Mr. Morford contracted his shaggy brows, but his face looked very bland and mild.

"Nothing at all? You said that Mr. Benson told you he was going to die. How came he to say that?"

"I dunno. Jist ter pass the time, I reckon," said Jerry, with a confused look.

"A queer pastime. Did he say or do anything else? Did he have anything to say about me?"

"Dunno as this were in our contract," declared Jerry, who was desperately afraid he might be led to commit himself. "You're a-payin' me fur my work, and my work's done. Didn't go inter no gab contract. Hand over them spondulicks, and I'll vamoze."

Mr. Morford laughed pleasantly.

"You're a sly fellow, Jerry. You're not the one to tell all you know. I like you for that. But no matter. As I told you, I am going to look after you. I am going to send you on a railroad trip to my brother in Pennsylvania. He wants just such a boy as you."

"What ter do?" demanded Jerry.

"You will have a chance to learn a nice light business."

"Nary time," answered Jerry, obstinately. "Ain't goin' inter no business yit. Ain't old 'nough. Calkerlate ter toddle round the country yere a bit longer."

"Do I understand that you refuse my offer?" asked Mr. Morford, bending his beetling brows.

"If yer don't understand it that way, yer better try and fetch yerself round as quick as yer kin."

"Hang it, boy! You can't spend your life vagabonding about here. If you would prefer to go back to New York, I'll pay your way there and give you something for a nest egg. I hate to see a fine young lad like you settling down into a mere tramp."

"Nary New York," answered Jerry, positively. "Kinder like the locks o' things round yere. Won't git jist yet. S'pose yer hand over them bits o' silver, Mr. Morford. Long's you don't want me here no longer I'll take my bundle and vamoze."

Without a word more Mr. Morford handed Jerry the four dollars promised, and the independent boy left the room.

The gentleman sat at his desk with a face full of deep reflection and sinister meaning.

"Hang the young bound!" he muttered.

"What I suspected is true. Something has passed between him and Benson. I could see it in their eyes and faces. Sharp as they were they could not fool me. And the boy's beha-

vior now confirms it. What could it have been? I would give much to know. I am not out of danger yet—I feel that. There is something in the wind. But, by the gods, I will stop it! I am not the man to go so far on a dangerous track and then be checked. That boy must and shall be got rid of!"

He put on his hat with a very determined look, and left the house.

That night, at ten o'clock, while Jerry was making his way toward a country inn, where he intended to seek a night's lodging, after his two days' tramp, he was suddenly grasped by two stalwart fellows, who sprung upon him from a carriage which had driven rapidly up.

Though taken by surprise, he made a brave struggle for freedom, striking his principal assailant a hard blow in the face. The fellow retaliated by a stunning blow from a heavy mace, which felled the boy as though he had been struck by a butcher's ax.

He lay there insensible beneath the gleaming stars.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW JERRY'S LITTLE GAME WAS BLOCKED.

WHEN Jerry returned to his senses it was morning. He had received such a severe blow that he remained insensible during the remainder of the night.

He found himself in a narrow, close room, on the first floor of a house, for he could see the tops of bushes brushing the window.

He lay on a rough couch, a well-worn horse-blanket having been thrown over him.

It was some time before he could recover his wits and remember the events of the night before. There was a dizzy buzzing in his head, and a sharp pain where he had received the blow.

Gradually it all came back to him, his interview with Mr. Morford, his refusal to leave that locality, the struggle with his assailants, and the blow that had felled him to the ground.

"It's him that's done this," he muttered, with set teeth. "He's down on me 'kaze I wouldn't cut stick. Wants ter git rid o' me, old Morford does. Bet yer bottom dollar he don't succeed in that little racket. Ther's a little game up somewhere, and I'm jist death on game."

He rose and walked around the room. He staggered with dizziness at first, but gradually regained his strength. After some two minutes of exercise he began to feel like his old self again.

"Bet I ain't a-goin' ter stay here," he declared. "If I don't walk up to ther scratch tomorrow night, 'cordin' ter promise, there'll be ghostes in my wool sure's I'm a livin' coon."

He tried the door. It was locked, as he had expected. He next walked to the window, and lifted the sash. It freely yielded. This he did not expect.

"Thought they nabbed me ter keep me," he said to himself. "Didn't go ter all this trouble fur nothin', did they? Mought as well locked me up in ther middle of a ten-acre field. Reckon I'll step out fur a little walk, if they don't mind."

He stepped from a chair to the window-sill, and sprung from the latter to the garden that lay outside.

"Dunno what they brung me yere fur," he muttered, as he drew a long breath of the fresh May air. "Can't see through this biz, 'cept they've robbed me, and stuck me in yere fur a snooze."

He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out one of the bills he had received from Mr. Benson.

"That's all right," he declared. "That plunder's salted down where I put it."

At that instant he was startled by a hand grasping him firmly by the collar, and another hand snatching the bank note from his fingers.

"I'll take care of that plunder, my prime young highwayman," cried a harsh voice in his ears. "You heard the thieving rascal, Joe? He acknowledged?"

"Just so," came another voice. "We had better take him at once before the squire."

Jerry by this time had recovered from the startling surprise.

He twisted around, and discovered that a tall, hard-faced fellow had him by the collar, in a stern grip. The other speaker was a stalwart, ill-dressed chap, with an ugly countenance.

The captive at a glance set them down as his assailants of the night before, though of this he could not be very sure.

"Let me go!" he cried, trying to tear himself loose. "What you holdin' me fur? I ain't done nothin'."

"Nothing but a bit of burglary," answered

the man who held him. "C me with me, you young vagabond. You robbed the man who took you in and gave you a home. I bet we railroad you to jail for this. Think the squire will be at his office, Joe?"

"It's about his time."

"Then I'll take the chap there. You go see Mr. Morford and ask him if he is ready to appear."

Jerry made no further effort to escape. It was plain that it would be useless. The man that held him was a powerful fellow, in whose hands he was as a feather.

And the shrewd boy began to smell a rat. The mention of Mr. Morford's name had let new light in upon him. This was a plan to get him out of the way.

He said nothing more, but quietly followed his captor, who still firmly grasped him by the collar. There was no use wasting words on the thin air.

But he ground his teeth in spite at his own lack of caution. If he had had the wit to take to his heels immediately after leaving the window this would not have occurred.

"S'pose everybody's got ter play the fool sometime," he said to himself. "But I jist oughter be kicked, fur tumblin' inter these fellers' racket. Mought ha' knowed better if I'd had as much sense as a suckin' pig."

By this time they were in the street. He saw that he was in the town which he had left the day before. He had evidently been brought back after being ambushed and captured.

A short walk through the streets brought them to the squire's office, which was a square brick one-storied building.

Into this the young prisoner was taken. He was followed by a crowd of the townsmen, who had been attracted by the street spectacle.

The magistrate, a bluff, fat, sleepy-faced old fellow, looked up inquiringly.

"Who've you got there, Jones?" he asked. "A despret looking young vagrant, on my life! Where did you pick him up?"

"He is charged with theft, your Honor. He has been employed by Mr. Morford, as an attendant on Mr. Benson. Yesterday he was discharged, as no longer needed. After his discharge Mr. Morford missed some money, and sent me after him. I caught him last night, and found the stolen money on him this morning."

He held up the bank note with one hand, and pushed Jerry roughly forward with the other.

By this time the young prisoner was getting his blood up. His first feeling of consternation was giving way to one of anger.

"It's a lie!" he cried hoarsely. "I never stole a cent from Gabe Morford. He's afeard o' me, that's what, and he wants ter git me inter a pickle."

"Hold your tongue, boy, till the squire questions you," said the constable.

"I won't hold my tongue! You hadn't no biz ter knock me down the way you did. Jist see yere, squire, where this big lummo hit me."

He took off his cap and revealed the bloody spot on his hair.

"That's a rough knock, Smith," remarked the squire. "And for a boy."

"I didn't intend to hit him so hard," replied Smith in a tone of apology. "He tried to escape and I had to tap him."

"Ye'r a dirty-faced liar," cried Jerry indignantly. "And a thief to boot. Guv me back my money, as you robbed me of!"

He made a clutch for the note, but the constable put it out of his reach.

"Here it is, squire," he said, laying it on the desk before the magistrate. "I have sent for Mr. Morford. He will be here very soon."

"It's my money," exclaimed Jerry. "I never stole a cent from anybody."

"Where did you get it?" asked the squire, looking at him suspiciously. "Road vagrants, as they say you were when Mr. Morford hired you, don't often have twenty-dollar bills in their pockets."

Jerry did not answer. A look of confusion came upon his face. The squire was right. How was he to explain the possession of so much money? The other money which he had received was in his bundle, which he had concealed that day in a safe place. But he had neglected to obey Mr. Benson's injunction to conceal all his money.

Fortunately he had also hidden the key and the vial received from Mr. Benson. If they had been taken from him he would have been in despair. As it was, he must trust to luck to escape from this awkward situation.

Ere more words could be said the messenger who had been sent for Mr. Morford returned.

"I saw him, squire, but he will not be able to

appear," he remarked. "He was on his way to the station, and says he has important business in New York, and couldn't lose the train on any account. I told him about the money found on the boy, and he says that was just the amount he lost. It was taken from his desk, where he saw the prisoner fumbling. He will appear tomorrow, and hopes you will detain the thief till then."

The squire bent a suspicious glance on Jerry.

"This is a serious charge," he said. "What have you to say to it?"

"If I'd say all I could say, you bet I'd make Guil Morford howl," he answered. "I can't say nothin' yet, 'kaze I promised I wouldn't. But he ain't nobody's ice-cream angel, now you bet. And that money's mine. I never stoled a red penny from him nor anybody."

Looks were exchanged among the persons present at these words. They were in the line of the suspicions that were afloat. Did the boy know something that might throw light on this dark mystery?

Many hoped that the squire would question him on this point. But the squire was busily writing.

"Here is a commitment," he said to the constable. "We must hold him until Mr. Morford can appear."

Jerry tried to speak again, but the magistrate would not listen.

"Take him away," he ordered. "There is no doubt that he is the thief. This money convicts him."

"All right," cried Jerry. "Morford's got his innings now, but my turn's a-comin'. Jist wait till I git the bat. I bet I guv him a settler."

He was dragged away with these words. The place to which he was taken was a dilapidated old barracks that served as the lock-up of the town, the jail being in another town several miles distant.

Part of this building was occupied as a dwelling by the constable and his family, two or three strong rooms on the upper floor serving as a place of confinement for such prisoners as were to be held until they could be removed to jail.

Into one of these rooms Jerry was thrust, and the key turned upon him.

The room was a strong one, with a solid oaken door, and barred windows.

He took but a single look at it, and then dropped on the only chair the room contained, and buried his face in his hands.

For the time being Jerry was completely demoralized. His enemy had the whip hand of him.

He regained his composure after a while. He was not one to be lon' cast down.

"I never stoled nothin' from him, and they can't prove it," he said, with some confidence. "If he pushes me too close I'll tell where I got that money. I ain't goin' to be sot down on by no Guil Morford."

The hours moved very slowly in that prison cell. Yet the hour of midnight would soon be at hand, and he could not forget the serious duty set for him at that dead hour of the night. How was it to be performed? By what means was he to escape from his awkward dilemma?

Jerry grew nervous. He attacked the constable with eager questions when this personage brought up his dinner.

"Mr. Morford won't be back to-day," said the latter. "He has just telegraphed to Squire Thompson. Business keeps him in New York. Your hearing cannot come off till to-morrow."

"Now that's all taffy," cried Jerry, angrily. "It's got ter be did to-day. Got partik'lar bizness to-night, and can't stay here nobow."

"I don't see how you are to help it," laughed the constable. "Your business will have to wait till after you've served out your term in jail, for that's where you'll go to-morrow. Don't you think you can put it off for two or three years?"

"It's all a dodge! I never stoled the money! And I must git out o' this."

"I don't know how you'll manage it," retorted the constable, with a loud laugh, as he closed the door and walked away.

Jerry flung himself down in despair. It looked as if he would not be able to keep the pledge he had so solemnly taken. If that night passed without the coffin being opened, the most dire consequences might ensue. Just what would happen he had no idea, but he was sure it would be something horrible.

Yet the day passed by and he was still a prisoner. Night came on. He had made up his mind, as a last hope, to reveal the whole truth to the constable when he came with his supper.

But the constable failed to come. Jerry's hope that he might fulfill his promise through him vanished into thin air.

Night moved on toward the midnight hour. The prisoner was in despair. What was to be done? Could anything be done? There was no hope, no hope! The clock had begun to strike. He listened eagerly. The strokes kept on till they numbered twelve. It was the fatal midnight hour! All was lost!

CHAPTER VII.

JERRY'S MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE.

JERRY had flung himself in despair on the hard floor of his prison, as one by one the strokes of the clock fell like thunder-peals upon his heart. He had so solemnly promised to obey the wishes of the dead man, and was full of dread of the consequences of not fulfilling his promise.

The slow strokes kept on, until the full tale of twelve was reached. As the last sound died away in slow vibrations the prisoner sprang impulsively to his feet. He had suddenly made up his mind. If he could not go to the tomb himself, somebody must go. He would rouse up the constable, and tell him his strange story.

In an instant he was pounding noisily at the door of the cell. The idea has struck him like an inspiration, and he lost not a moment in reflection.

With fists and feet he pounded on the strong portal, rattled noisily at the lock, and accompanied his efforts with loud cries and yells.

"Hello! Hey! Wake up, folks! Fire, fire! Water! Rats! Rats!"

He kept up this for full ten minutes, aiding his attack on the door by blows from a heavy chair, as his fists grew weary.

"Fire, fire! Rats, rats, rats!" he continued to yell. "They're eatin' me alive! Hey, below there!"

Pausing an instant for rest, he heard hasty steps outside, and a call in an excited voice:

"What's the matter there? What's all that hullabaloo about?"

Jerry only answered by recommencing his attacks on the door. The chair went to pieces in his hand at the next blow, but he caught up two thick rounds, and played them on the stout oak like a pair of drumsticks.

"Thunder and lightning! Won't you stop that? What's broke loose in there, I say?"

"Rats, rats, rats!" yelled Jerry. "Thousands on 'em! Millions on 'em! They're chawin' me up alive! Let me out! Let me out!"

"Hold up, you devil's imp!" cried the constable. "Have you gone crazy? There's no rats there!"

"It's full ov 'em! There's barrels ov 'em!" screamed Jerry, in a tone of mortal terror. "Open the door! Oh, open the door! Fore they chaw me inter mince-meat!"

He recommenced his attack with drumsticks and feet.

The constable was growing alarmed. There were rats in the house, he knew that. Had they made a combined assault on the prisoner? Calling out to him to wait till he could get the door open, he inserted the key and turned it in the lock.

In an instant the unlocked door was flung open with such force as to knock him back against the wall.

Still yelling "Rats, rats, rats!" Jerry jumped out, playing about him with his drumsticks as if he was fighting with unseen antagonists.

One of the sticks came in contact with the skull of the constable, making a thousand stars to dance before his eyes.

"Rats, rats, rats!" yelled Jerry, dashing away as if in mortal terror.

Ere the constable could recover from his surprise the boy had gained the stairs, and was plunging down them at full speed.

Just what to make of all this the astounded man did not know. The terror of the boy seemed so real that for the moment he could not imagine there was any sham, and he stopped to look into the cell, half expecting to see a host of rats.

But not even the tail of a rat was visible, and it ran through the dazed head of the constable like a flash that he had been neatly humbugged.

He turned in pursuit. By that time the fleeing boy had gained so much headway that his steps could just be heard in the lower part of the house.

With a fierce oath the constable sprang forward, through the passage and down the dark stairs.

He had the advantage of Jerry in knowing the way. He could run at full speed where the boy had been forced to grope in darkness.

"There'll be the deuce to pay if he escapes," cried the pursuer, through his set lips. "But the front door is locked. It is a hard lock to turn. I have him there."

By this time he had gained the lower floor. No sign of the fugitive was visible in the dark passage.

"He can't have gone!" cried the constable, too desperate in his haste to stop for any close investigation. There was a darker shadow in a corner of the hall, but this he was too excited to perceive.

He ran wildly to the door, turned the key with both hands, and threw it open and peered out into the night.

But he drew instantly back with a return of his wits.

"He couldn't have gone out and locked the door behind him," he exclaimed. "He must be in the house yet. Where is he?"

"Here," cried a voice at his elbow.

At the same instant the dark shadow in the hall made a movement. There was a crack as if a cocoanut had been split. Then came the sound of a fall that shook the house. The constable lay prostrate.

The shadow was no other than the crouching form of Jerry Jarman. The movement had been that of his arm and club. The crack had been that of said club on the constable's skull.

"Reckon we're 'bout even," cried the boy. "You busted my head open with a club last night. Busted yours open to-night. Guess we're 'bout quits, and I'll git, if you ain't got no 'jections."

He jumped over his prostrate foe, who lay groaning on the floor, sprung through the open door, and was out in the night.

He had trusted to chance, and chance had favored him. He had begun his attack on his cell door without dreaming of such a conclusion, and had simply taken advantage of circumstances as they arose.

Yet here he was free in the open night, and his keeper groaning on the floor within, too deeply stunned to pursue.

"Reckon I'll slide 'fore he gits his seven senses back," reflected Jerry. "He ain't got more nor one an' a half on 'em now. Golly, but that were done neat! Cotched him on the fly that time, I did. But I got ter git lively, for he mought be on his pegs ag'in any minute."

It must not be imagined that he had stopped to speak these words. He had been taught the risk of stopping in dangerous situations when he jumped through the window that morning, and he was running at his best speed as these thoughts passed through his head.

"There's one thing sure, they'll never think o' lookin' fur me in a graveyard," he considered. "And that's jist where I'm bound."

Though the hour of midnight had struck not many minutes had passed since. Mr. Benson had not insisted on the exact minute of midnight, and Jerry fancied that a half-hour or so late would not matter, under the peculiar circumstances.

Just what was to come of his adventure he had not taken the trouble to think. He knew what he was to do, and the corpse was to do its own share of the business.

He made the utmost haste toward the spot where he had concealed his bundle, with its precious contents.

The place in which he had been imprisoned lay in the edge of the town, and he hurried toward the open country, not fancying the streets just then.

He had another object in this. The cemetery which he was to invade lay about a mile off in this direction. And his bundle had been hidden within a stone's throw of this cemetery. Jerry had an eye to saving time and trouble in this operation.

Ere he was a quarter of a mile from the town, however, he heard a noise in the streets behind him. He was not long in deciding what it meant. The constable had recovered his senses and given the alarm. The hue and cry would be out after him in a few minutes more.

Jerry was in the road leading to the cemetery. This was not safe. He leaped the fence into the adjoining field, and began to make his way across lots.

It was a clear, moonlight night. He would have to be on the alert, since he could be seen to a considerable distance.

He kept on till he was far back from the road, though taking care to avoid houses. He did not want to stir up wakeful dogs.

Twenty minutes of this progress brought the fugitive to the rear wall of the cemetery. Here he paused and listened. He could hear distant

noises, some of them the barking of dogs, some that sounded like human voices.

"They're arter me, sure as shootin'," he ejaculated. "But I reckon it's easier ter let go a weasel than ter catch hold ag'in. They'll never think o' huntin' me in a graveyard, arter twelve o'clock at night. Not if they're 'feard o' ghosts as I am, anyway."

By this time he had gained a bushy ravine, that lay a few hundred yards in the rear of the cemetery wall. Selecting a point in the edge of this ravine, he pushed his way in through the bushes.

It was dark within, but Jerry seemed to know just where he was. Halting near a clump of alder bushes he flung himself on the ground, and crawled in beneath them.

He now thrust his hand down through a heap of dead leaves that filled a small hole in the ground. In a minute the hand reappeared, clutching his precious bundle.

"Kalkerlated nobody'd find it there," he said, in a tone of satisfaction. "Now let's see if everything's square."

He drew back into a patch of moonlight, where he opened the bundle and investigated its contents.

"Here they be!" he cried with satisfaction, as he drew out the key and the vial, with a chisel and other tools which he had provided. "Reckon I'll leave ther money alone. If I hadn't been a double-j'inted jackass, I'd had my twenty dollars yere, too. Went it blind there, I did. Thought it were one dollar I were keepin', 'stead o' twenty. That comes from want o' early education, I s'pose."

As he spoke he had again tied up the bundle, and replaced it in its place of concealment.

Securing the valuable articles in his pockets, the young adventurer rose to his feet and made his way to the cemetery wall. He climbed over this, not without misgivings. At the first sight of the white gravestones, gleaming so ghost-like in the rays of the moon, he almost dropped back in affright.

But a second glance proved to him that these were not wandering specters, and plucking up his courage he sprang from the low wall down among the graves.

"I'm in fur it now," said Jerry to himself, setting his teeth firmly. "Mr. Benson said as how ther' weren't no sich things as ghosts, and I reckon he oughter know, bein' as he was 'most one hisself. I'm a-goin' through this if they all git out o' ther graves. You kin bet yer lively half-dollars on that."

With this resolution Jerry went forward with more confidence. He had a start, when he stumbled over a gravestone. But as the inmate of the grave did not rise in spectral form to punish him, he pushed on.

A few minutes brought him in front of the vault, whose position he had clearly noted on the day of the funeral.

A shudder ran through him as he touched the iron doors, which gave out a low, clanging sound that froze his blood. He was just in the state of mind to be scared by a shadow.

Yet just then he would not have run from a legion of ghosts. He might be frightened, but he was there on a dead man's business, and that he must put through.

Stooping, the now doubly wide awake boy inserted the key, which the entombed man had given him, into the lock of the vault door. The key readily turned in the lock, and the door fell open inward with a clang that set his hair on end; but with desperate resolution he at once advanced into the vault.

The low-down moon was in such a position that its light entered the gloomy recess and illuminated its depths. It even fell in a patch of light on the silver nails of the coffin which he sought.

The lid of this had been fastened down by large-headed screws. Trying these, he was overjoyed to find that he could turn them easily with his hand. There would be no need to use the hammer and chisel which he had brought.

Hastily—for fear of possible interruption by beings, living or dead—he unscrewed the several screws. Within five minutes they were all removed, and the coffin-lid lay loose.

Jerry drew back in momentary awe. The worst of his task lay yet before him—to lift that shrouding lid and gaze on the dead face that lay within. He feared yet that the corpse might rise like a specter and freeze the marrow in his bones.

Setting his teeth desperately he laid his hands on the lid and gave it a hard shove. It slipped over the coffin and fell with a dead sound into the stone recess behind it.

He looked into the open casket, expecting to

see a pair of dead eyes glaring frightfully up into his.

To his utter astonishment and consternation he saw nothing. The coffin was empty! He plunged in his hand, but it met only the empty bottom and sides.

Jerry fell back with more fright than if he had seen all his fancy had conjectured.

And at that critical moment a cold hand clutched him by the throat.

A wild cry broke from his lips, and he fell prostrate. In his excited fancy he felt sure that the ghost of the dead man had taken prisoner the daring invader of his tomb.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GHOST THAT CAUGHT JERRY.

WE must return to the constable, whom we left groaning and half senseless in the hall of his residence, where he had been felled by Jerry's club.

This condition only lasted for two or three minutes, but that was long enough to give the active boy a good start.

Then the constable rose to his feet, with a full recollection of all that had happened. He put his hand to the painful spot on his head. It came away wet with blood.

A sensation of rage passed through his heart. If he had got hold of Jerry Jarman at that minute it would have gone hard with him. Luckily for Jerry he was out of reach.

The enraged constable did the next best thing. He rushed into the street, giving the alarm at the top of his voice. He ran onward with the fury of a mad bull, to where the lights of a public house showed that it was still open.

At the sound of his loud outcry a dozen men came hurrying out of the place, demanding in excited tones what had happened.

"What's the fire?" demanded one tipsy individual.

"Ain't been no earthquake?" asked another.

"A prisoner has broke jail," cried the constable. "He cut my head open with an iron bar, and run. He must be pursued at once. I demand your aid."

A few more questions brought out the facts of the case. The tavern loungers, fully ready for an adventure, put themselves under the orders of the constable, who quickly divided them into three parties.

One of these was to search the town. The others were to follow the two roads which led out of the town.

Though all haste was made some time was lost in these preliminaries, and by the time the several parties had set off full twenty minutes had elapsed from the moment of Jerry's escape.

One party, composed of four men, made for the road which Jerry had actually followed. They had all been drinking, but were sober enough to have their senses about them.

The party led by the constable took the other road, while the third party began a search of the town.

Of these several searching divisions we are concerned with but one, that which was on Jerry's actual track.

It kept to the road, though not without mounting the fences, and taking long looks over the neighboring fields, which lay clearly revealed under the bright moonlight.

Nothing suspicious was seen, however. Jerry had too much start to be caught in this way.

The party kept on until they reached the locality of the cemetery. A long wall here bordered the roadside.

As Jerry had shrewdly conjectured there was no thought of examining this place. No one dreamed that a fugitive would hide among the graves at midnight. And none of the searchers felt any strong desire to investigate the tombs at that hour.

They had traversed half the length of the wall, when one of them stopped, with a low and frightened exclamation.

"Hark!" he cried, in suppressed tones. "Do you hear that?"

"What?" demanded the startled party.

"I heard a noise inside there. There it is again."

"Nonsense! You're dreaming. There is no noise there."

At this instant there came a loud clang, that made their hearts jump in their breasts. It was like the sound of a hammer on ringing iron. Was a ghostly drum beating to call the dead from their graves?

One of the party took to his heels. The others stood shivering under the wall. Only one of them preserved any shreds of courage, and he was the most intoxicated of the party.

"This here chicken don't b'lieve in ghosts," he

cried valiantly. "I'm a-goin' over that wall to see what's inside."

"Oh Lord, Jack! don't you do it. I wouldn't for a pile of diamonds."

"I wouldn't neither if I was as skeery a baby as you. I've a notion it's the fellow we're after inside there, and I'm goin' to see."

This suggestion put a new phase on the matter, and helped to restore their lost courage. They helped him to climb the wall, and followed him over it.

Reaching the ground inside they halted and looked around them. The Benson vault was some distance away, but the moonlight fell full upon its front.

Suddenly one of the party clutched his two associates with a nervous grasp, and cried in low and startled tones:

"Look! The vault doors are open! There's something moving inside! Is George Benson walking in his grave?"

"Let us fly!" said a second, in shuddering tones. "It's frightful! We might have known it, to come among the tombs at this hour!"

"Known what?" demanded the third, whom drink made courageous. "Jist you b'lieve me, dead things don't walk. Ther's somethin' livin' there, and I'm goin' to find out what."

He moved stealthily forward, followed at some distance by his trembling associates. A minute's progress brought him to the door of the vault, within which Jerry, unconscious of what was passing behind him, had just pushed back the lid of the coffin.

He was too excited by what he was doing to hear the slight noises behind him. He did not dream but that he was alone in that dismal vault. He did not dream that, at the moment he had been startled and astounded by discovering the emptiness of the coffin, that a man stood behind him, with a face full of indignation, and an outstretched arm.

It is not surprising, then, that Jerry, on feeling that cold and skeleton-like clutch upon his throat, at the instant his hand was exploring the empty coffin, was seized with the full belief that he was being throttled by spectral hands.

He fell on his knees, with a howl of dismay and terror, very natural under the circumstances.

"Oh, good ghost!" he yelled, in accents of horror. "Oh, sweet little devil! don't fly away with me, kase I couldn't help it, and you know I couldn't. Oh, let me go! You told me to do it yerself—you know you did! How was I ter know you was outer yer coffin, takin' a walk 'round? Oh, jist let me go, and I'll never do it ag'in—never 's long as I live! Won't yer let me go this time, good ghost?"

During this series of ejaculations the captor continued to clutch Jerry's throat. He now caught him by the collar and dragged him to his feet, crying in his ear:

"Shut your jaw, you little rascal! You're caught this time. You're lucky if you don't get ten years for this. Grave-robbing ain't no baby's play."

These words changed the current of Jerry's thoughts. That was no spectral voice. He twisted around and looked back to see what was behind him.

"Thunder and lightnin', it ain't no ghost arter all!" he said, in relief. "What the blazes is you tryin' to skeer me fer, you ugly blunderbuss? Let go my collar!"

"Not just yet, my lovely! Come out here till we can see you in the moonlight. Look at this chap. Do any of you know him?"

The other two crowded up.

"It's the boy we're after!" cried one. "It is the escaped prisoner. I saw him when he was before the squire."

"And what is he doing here?"

"Robbing the grave!" cried the third. "See! The door has been opened by a key. The coffin is open, and the body gone."

"But he could not have taken it alone. He must have had confederates. Where are they?"

"I didn't do nothin' of the sort!" pleaded Jerry, earnestly. "I come here 'kase he axed me to, and he guv me this key hisself."

"Who did?"

"The ghost. Mr. Benson, I mean."

"The ghost asked you? That's a pretty story. Where is the corpse? Who has taken it?"

"I know nothin' 'bout it. I jist come here, and ther coffin's empty. S'pect he's out for a walk, kase it's 'bout the time they go out walkin'."

"Who do?"

"Ghosts and sich. Dunno how you folks feel, but I'm skeered enough ter howl. If yer ain't goin' ter take me away from yere, let go and I'll take myself away. I'm drefful 'feard o' that

empty coffin. S'pose he comes back jist now!"

This was a startling suggestion to his captors, who did not feel over comfortable themselves.

"It's the queerest business I ever see'd," said one of them. "What's this boy doing here if he helped rob the grave? And who's got the body? It gits me. Let's lock up, and leave the place. Hold on to your prisoner, Jack. He's mixed in it somehow."

He locked the vault door, and took the key. They started hastily away, dragging their prisoner, and not pausing till they had gained the outside of the cemetery wall. Then for the first time they drew a comfortable breath.

"You jist let me go!" cried Jerry, making a vain effort to break loose. "He told me to do it and I couldn't help it."

"Who told you?"

"Mr. Benson."

"Mr. Benson's dead, you fool! Are you scared out of your wits?"

"He ain't dead. He's outer his coffin, walkin' 'round somewhere. S'pose he comes back and finds you've locked him out? I bet he goes for you."

This suggestion did not increase the comfort of the superstitious men, who had been scared sober. They hurried away from that perilous spot, down the road toward the town, dragging Jerry with them.

But the young prisoner did not quite relish this part of the programme. He struggled in the hands that held them, and greatly impeded their progress.

"We've got to get rid of this squirming little rat," cried one angrily. "He's worse to hold than a weasel. I don't see that we should take him back to the constable. He didn't keep him any too well when he had him. Here's Doctor Brown's house. He's one of the town council, and he ought to know about this business. We can ask him what's best to do with our prisoner."

"It's a late hour to stir up the doctor."

"Oh, he's awake. There's a light burning in that second-story room. Ring the bell, Joe. Rouse him up."

This request was at once obeyed. The bell was pulled with a vigorous hand. Yet the summons had to be repeated half a dozen times before any response came.

Then a window was raised, and a voice asked, in accents of seeming nervousness:

"Who is there? Is somebody sick?"

"No, doctor. We're on other business. There's a queer thing happened. And we want you're advice about it."

This demand was followed after a minute by the opening of the front door, and the appearance of the worthy physician.

He was fully dressed, but there was something strangely agitated in his manner.

"Come in, gentlemen. Come in," he said nervously. "What has happened? Whom have you there?"

"A grave-robbin'. A resurrector. We caught him in the act."

The doctor looked as if he would faint. He sunk limply into a chair, in the room to which he had led.

"Grave-robbing? Resurrection?" he faltered. "I do not understand you."

"A dreadful outrage has happened," answered one of the men. "Mr. Benson's tomb has been broken open to-night, and the coffin rifled. We found the vault open, and this boy in it. The lid was off of the coffin, and the body had disappeared."

Dr. Brown looked from one to the other with an air of stupefaction. He had lost every grain of his usual self-possession. The information he had received seemed to affect him very strangely.

He fixed his eyes on the young captive with an air of astonishment.

"You found the vault open, and this boy in it? That seems incredible."

"And the corpse gone."

"I didn't take him," cried Jerry. "He guv me the key hisself and told me ter do it. I were only 'beyin' orders. 'Tweren't me tuk him outer his coffin. Reckon he'd gone out hisself fur a walk."

"He had a key to the vault," said the captor. "We found it in the lock."

"This is the most remarkable circumstance I ever heard," declared the doctor, who appeared to have suddenly regained some degree of composure. "It must be sifted thoroughly. This is the boy who was nursing Mr. Benson. I recognize him."

"Jist so, doctor," broke out Jerry. "And he told me—"

"There, there, explanations may wait. This boy was arrested to-day for theft, and locked up. How comes he abroad?"

"He broke out of the lock-up. We were chasing him. We found him in the cemetery, and in the Benson vault."

"This is extraordinary! I never heard of anything equal to it. Why the boy is a wonder! The lock-up could not hold him, you say?"

"No. That's one thing we stopped here for. We thought you might give us some advice how to secure him till morning."

The doctor appeared to reflect for a moment. "I'll tell you," he said at length. "I have a very secure room in my house. It is one that I have made specially strong for a certain purpose. If you are satisfied with that he might be locked up there till morning. I fancy he will not get away."

The men were only too willing to take this suggestion. Jerry was taken to the strong room in question, and locked up for the third time within two days. The doctor then dismissed his visitors, with an air as if he were glad to get rid of them.

He returned to Jerry's prison, and opened the door.

"See here, my boy," he said. "I want you to wait for an hour, so that I can have a talk with you. If you can explain this matter satisfactorily I will stand your friend. Don't try to escape, for no harm will come to you if you trust to me."

He locked the door again, leaving the prisoner to reflect on this strange communication.

CHAPTER IX.

SOMETHING LIKE A SURPRISE.

It was all very well in Doctor Brown to ask Jerry to wait for an hour till he could have a talk with him. Jerry had no fancy to wait, if there was any way to get out of his difficulty.

After a few minutes to regain his vanished wits he began to look at things in a new light. Until now he had not got over his scare at finding the coffin empty, and at the clutch of the cold hand on his throat.

It made him shiver yet to think of it, but the moment he had time for a cool thought he began to doubt his idea that the corpse was out for a midnight stroll.

"He told me himself there weren't no sich things as ghosts," considered Jerry. "And I don't b'lieve he's the sort ter go back on his word that way. And moresoever he wouldn't a-took ther trouble ter fotch me out at twelve o'clock at night jist ter giv me a skeer. Wouldn't be no sort o' sense or reason in that."

The boy dropped his head on his hand and fell into a spell of deep reflection, that kept him still for several minutes.

It ended by his springing hastily to his feet, with a new light in his eyes, and a look of resolution on his face.

"You bet I got it now," he exclaimed. "Somebody else has been at that coffin afore me. Maybe Benson axed somebody else ter come there too, and kaze I was late he got ahead o' me. Or else it's resurrectors, as that chap said. They've stole the boss and locked the stable door behind them."

This idea filled Jerry's busy brain with sharp anxiety. He could not forget his promise to the dead man. But how was he to carry it out if the body was stolen? And what good would it do to put the handkerchief on his face after he had been cut to pieces by the doctor?

Something must be done. The corpse must be found. Who had him?

At this thought the recollection of Dr. Brown's nervousness and strange behavior came to his mind. Was he in it? Jerry remembered that the doctor had wanted to cut the corpse open to discover what disease had killed him. Maybe he was at it now. Maybe he had stolen the body for this purpose.

This idea ran like a lightning flash through his brain. Something must be done, and that at once. He had pledged himself to a dead man, and was to be haunted all his life by a ghost if he did not keep his pledge.

"He axed me ter wait fur an hour till he could have a confab with me. What's he want ter do that hour? Not ter sleep, I reckon. Ther's somethin' ugly in ther wind, Jerry Jarman, you bet. And what's he ax me ter wait fur when he's got me in his strong room? Maybe that's all a dodge, and it ain't as strong as he lets on."

Full of this idea the active boy started on a tour of investigation. The door of the room certainly looked strong enough, and was fastened by a powerful lock.

There was one small window. Jerry looked out of this into the night. The ground lay far below him. He was on the third floor of the building, with a depth below which he could not leap without great danger of a broken neck.

The sash, too, was fastened down, as he found on attempting to lift it. A nail was driven in above it on both sides, too firmly to be removed without instruments.

This seeming difficulty brought a smile to Jerry's face. He was not to be held prisoner by any such shallow device.

"Lucky they didn't take that hammer and chisel from me," he declared. "Weren't much use with ther coffin, but I reckon they'll come inter play with this winder."

He produced the tools, which he had stuck into a belt around his body, and in a very few minutes had broken off both the nails close to the wood, with no alarming noise.

"Jolly fur my side!" he exclaimed. "Can't hold this chicken by no sich baby play as that. The worst part o' ther job's the tumble. 'Spect I'll break my neck sure if I take that there jump."

He had lifted the sash and was looking out. The ground lay more than twenty feet below him. Beneath was a brick pavement. Nothing would save him from a broken neck and smashed bones if he attempted to descend at a jump.

But a thick growth of ivy covered that part of the wall, growing up to and around the window, and extending far toward the side of the house.

The venturesome boy reached out and felt this plant, in search of a strong branch, that might possibly bear his weight. His search was successful. He found a stem, as thick as his wrist, that ran up close by the window.

But at that instant he got a start. The sound of voices came to his ear. Had his projected escape been discovered? He drew cautiously back and listened intently.

The voices seemed to come from the outside, yet no person had been visible on the ground below. After a few moments he succeeded in locating them. They came from a window that lay in the wall to the right, on the floor below, and about fifteen feet distant.

A light also came from this window, though dimly, as if through curtains. The voices were very faint, as though they had come through the glass of the sash.

Jerry's ideas suddenly changed. The desire to escape gave place to a burning wish to investigate this room. Something was going on there. What it was he wanted very badly to find out. What was Doctor Brown doing that it would take him an hour to get through?

It might be a matter of life and death. Without an instant's further hesitation, the reckless boy swung himself out of the open window, and grasped the ivy stem.

He trusted his weight to it with some caution. To his delight it bore him, though it stretched at first as if it was tearing loose from the wall. It clung to the bricks by a thousand tiny hands, whose united strength was greater than the weight of a dangleing boy.

Down his handy rope Jerry went, foot by foot, feeling his way toward the window of which he was in search, and drawing himself over by every side stem he could find in that direction.

A few minutes of this work brought him on a level with the window he sought, though he was still five or six feet to the left of it.

In order to get on a line with it, he was obliged to descend several feet below its sill.

The old and well-rooted ivy still bravely bore his weight, but he must climb again to reach his desired goal.

The voices now came to him more clearly, yet still too faint for him to distinguish any words.

Loosing one hand, and holding on firmly with the other, he groped among the ivy twigs in search of another branch that would bear his weight.

At length he found it, a thick, strong stem, that gave him an impulse of joy. Grasping it strongly, and setting his feet in a crack of the wall to reduce his weight, he loosed his former hold, and clung with both hands to his new support.

Now he began to climb upward again. The ivy stretched and creaked with his weight, but it did not let go its clutch on the wall. There was but a few feet to ascend, and in a very short time he had a grasp on the sill of the window.

He caught it with both hands and set his toes in the ivy, lifting himself up till his face was on a level with the glass. But to his chagrin, the curtains were drawn close. The light came through, but nothing could be seen within.

Higher up the curtains were parted. The lower sash was down, but the upper sash was lowered, leaving an opening at its top of about six inches wide. It was through this that the sound of voices came.

He held himself still for a minute, intently listening. One of the voices he now recognized as that of Doctor Brown. He could even distinguish some of their words.

"You have got the case of instruments?"

"Yes."

"Lay it here, close at hand. We must do this work with haste."

"Did you ever see a more beautiful cadaver?"

"Cadaver?" said Jerry to himself. "What the blazes is that? Something good to eat, maybe?"

"The situation is an awkward one," resumed Dr. Brown. "That discovery is most unfortunate. I am going on with this now, whatever happens. But it must be returned before morning."

"What must be returned?" Jerry's curiosity and anxiety were now intense. He tried to raise the sash, but it would not yield. He then lifted himself so as to bring his head up to the level at which the curtains were parted.

One glance sufficed. A thrill ran through his frame as he caught a glimpse of what was going on within. And the thrill was not the less intense as he heard Dr. Brown say at that moment, in a cold, professional tone.

"Pass me that dissecting knife."

What Jerry saw was the form of Dr. Brown and of a young man, who looked like a student. They were standing on each side of a table, on which lay a figure, the sight of which almost made the observer let go his hold.

It was a deathlike form, the body naked to the waist, while a white sheet was thrown over its lower half.

The face was white as snow, and had the frightful set of death, though no sign of decay was visible.

But what gave Jerry his start was the fact that he recognized the face at a glance. It was the countenance of Mr. Benson! The secret of the empty coffin was revealed!

Dr. Brown had the dissecting knife in his hand. Something must be done at once. Jerry tugged at the sash, but it refused to yield. Setting his lips angrily he drew the hammer from his belt. It was no time now for half measures.

Yet, utterly unconscious of what was taking place without, Dr. Brown and the student went calmly on with their work.

The doctor had laid down his knife while he drew a long pair of gloves over his hands.

"We must open the chest first," he said. "The trouble may be in the heart. As for the stomach, I shall take that out to examine afterward."

"Do you think there has been any foul play?" demanded the student.

"I don't say that. But I couldn't understand the disease, and I am bound to find out the cause of George Benson's death."

"It is strange that there is no sign of decay. I never saw a cadaver so well kept. One would think the man was not dead."

"He will never breathe again," said the doctor, as he took up the razor-sharp knife, with its long, slender blade.

"I shall make the first incision here, and open the thoracic cavity."

He laid his finger on the spot indicated, and dropped the point of the knife, until it had slightly penetrated the flesh.

To the utter surprise of the operators, a few drops of blood oozed from the wound.

They both started back, the doctor dropping the knife in his astonishment.

At that instant there came a terrific crash at the window, as if a cannon-ball had crashed through it. Fragments of glass and of the woodwork of the sash, poured in a torrent into the room.

At the same moment a voice was heard in shrill yell:

"Murder! Bloody murder! You're killin' live man! Drop that knife or I'll smash ye head with ther hammer!"

A second crashing blow sent more fragments of the sash sweeping through the room. They were followed by a dark form, that dropped like a ball on the floor.

All this was more than the scared individual could stand. They turned and ran with speed for the door, through which they vanished at the moment that the ball-like figure straightened itself up into the little form of Jerry Jarman.

"Jist in time," he cried. "If I'd been a min"

later he'd 'a' dug in that butcher-knife, and it'd been all up."

He hurried up and looked down on the lifeless face, with its strange show of life in death.

"All I've got ter do's to do what I were told," declared Jerry. "That were my bargain, and I ain't more'n a couple o' hours late. An' I've got to stir my stumps, 'fore them skeered doctors come back."

He threw down the hammer, which he still held, and drew from his pocket a handkerchief. This he folded double, and laid on the face of the corpse, covering the mouth and nose, as directed.

Then producing the vial from his pocket, he drew out the cork, and hastily but carefully poured its precious contents on the handkerchief, taking care that not a drop should be wasted, and that it should wet that part directly over the mouth and nostrils.

"That's did," he said with satisfaction. "I've done my sheer of the bargain, and 'arnt my five hundred. Dunno what's ter come of it, but I'll bust the chap's head open as 'sturb; that handkercher."

He picked up the fallen hammer and started to the door. He had heard the steps of the fugitives returning. The key was in the door. Jerry quickly turned it and drew it out. He raised his hammer threateningly before the eyes of the returning doctor.

"I'll brain the fust feller as tries ter go inter that room 'fore I'm ready to let him in," he boldly declared.

CHAPTER X.

GUILBERT MORFORD AT THE HELM.

GUILBERT MORFORD had received the tidings of the arrest of Jerry Jarman that morning with a feeling of supreme satisfaction, though he took good care not to show this to the messenger.

"Tell the squire to hold him safe. He must not let him go on any account," he said. "You tell me you found the money on him?"

"Yes. A twenty-dollar bill."

"Just the amount that was stolen," declared Morford, concealing his inward surprise. "He is the thief beyond doubt. I am sorry I cannot appear against him at once. But my business is very important."

"That don't matter, Mr. Morford. He'll not get out of Squire Thompson's hands, I promise you, if you are a month away."

"Tell him I know that the boy is the thief. I saw him at my desk. See that he is locked up safely till I come back."

"All right, sir. Trust us for that."

It was not till Morford was on the train and safely on his way to New York that he let his inward satisfaction show itself in his face.

Then he rubbed his hands together in joy, while his countenance beamed with triumph.

"Safe! Safe at last!" he said to himself. "I have been standing over an earthquake; but it has rolled away beneath me without harm. My chief dread was Doctor Brown. It is lucky for me that the worthy doctor don't know his business overly well."

"Then I feared that boy. I noticed suspicious indications on the last day of Benson's illness. I dreaded that he had begun to suspect me, and had told some awkward story to his sharp young nurse."

"All is right now, thank my lucky stars! He has been two days buried. Two more days in the grave will remove every indication of foul play. I shall take good care that the boy does not have a hearing for two days. Then he may say what he will. The danger will be passed, and all he says will be set down to simple revenge."

He rubbed his hands again, as gladly as if he had performed some very praiseworthy act.

"I have played my cards with the skill of a master hand, and won the game," he continued to reflect. "Now for my reward. Ha! ha! Those that take Guilbert Morford for a fool do not know their man. I shall be revenged at once on that proud girl and her father. She shall suffer dearly for disdaining the hand of a man like me."

Reaching New York his first visit was to the office of a prominent Life Insurance Company. Here he notified the officers of the death of George Benson, showing the physician's certificate to that effect.

He then produced certain papers, which he liked before them.

"I believe we have you for twenty thousand," remarked quietly. "Taken out six years ago."

"The insurance is made, you will perceive, to Guilbert Morford. I am that person."

"Ah! yes. Happy to know you, Mr. Morford. Death sudden?"

"Oh, not at all! A lingering illness. Mr. Benson was laid up for five weeks, and was poorly before that."

"What was the disease?"

"Something wrong with the heart. The valves of the blood pumps got out of order." Morford smiled as he said this. "Poor fellow! He was a good friend of mine. I would sooner have him alive than twice your twenty thousand."

"Very well, Mr. Morford," said the officer, in his cool, business-like manner. "Thank you for notifying us. We must take our usual steps. You will hear from us in a few days. Will you leave me your address?"

Morford did so, and left the office with a light heart. All was going well.

He had two other insurance offices to visit, the whole amount of insurance being fifty thousand dollars.

"That was a shrewd game I played on Benson," he said to himself, "to exchange insurances. George fancied, I think, that he had more chance of life than me, and that he would handle the money. He did not know what an uncertain thing human life is."

The villain laughed aloud at the success of his perilous scheme.

His next journey was to a lawyer's office, in the lower part of the city. It was not a very reputable locality, and the legal gentleman to whom he applied might have had a more honest look without damage to his countenance. He appeared like one of those who will do anything without question, except as to his fee.

"I will take those papers now," said the visitor. "You have made the necessary improvements?"

"They are sound as the piers of the East River Bridge," answered the pettifogger. "I will read them to you. If there is anything you can suggest just say the word. I want my work to be strong."

He read several long-winded documents to his visitor, who listened with quiet satisfaction.

"I do not see that anything further is necessary," he remarked. "How much do I owe you Mr. Flint?"

"Three hundred."

"Is not that rather steep for three hours' work?"

"Not that kind of work. When one is digging diamonds he expects to get rich faster than if he is digging clay."

He fixed his eyes on Mr. Morford with a significant look.

Morford slightly colored.

"I don't understand you," he replied. "There is nothing wrong about this, Mr. Flint. I would have you know that it is a square transaction. I am just repairing one of those unfortunate oversights that the most careful men will make."

"I see," answered Flint, with an unhealthy grin. "But I always charge extra for repairing oversights. I do indeed."

Morford paid him his three hundred without a word more. It might be best to keep right with Mr. Flint.

Mr. Morford did not look altogether comfortable after he had regained the street.

"The rascal!" he muttered to himself. "He has bled me freely. But no matter. His work is worth it. And this ends my connection with him. If he tries blackmailing on me he will find he has no fool to deal with. He is deeper in the mire than he thinks, as I will show him if he tries any tricks."

Putting the valuable papers he had obtained in a safe pocket, he made his way to a fashionable restaurant, satisfied that he had earned a good dinner by his morning's work.

"I would not, for my life, have dared to show these papers while George Benson lived," he said to himself, as he lingered over his dinner. "He would have detected their weak spots at once, and proved them to be frauds. But now that he is dead I have nothing to dread. There is not a man living that knows the secrets of the property. He had to be removed before I could act."

He called for his dessert, and ate it with great relish.

"I shall teach that proud girl a lesson," he declared, with a spiteful face. "She shall see if I am the man she can treat with disdain. Mary Benson, the haughty beauty, shall yet beg for my hand, when she learns that riches have wings and that there is a prior claim to her father's property. The estate is mine. She cannot inherit it without marrying me."

There was a look of fiendish gratification on his face as he left the restaurant and walked away.

"I have got through my delicate work sooner

than I expected," he said. "But I cannot return for two days yet. The boy must not have his hearing until the day after-morrow. Then I do not care what he may say. It will be too late then for investigation."

He reflected as he walked along the street.

"How shall I dispose of this spare time? I have it! I may as well put this business in shape at once. I did not intend to do it just yet, but the coast is clear, and it is as well first as last. The office of the property records is in Lewis-town, Pennsylvania. I must go there at once, and direct that the proper investigation into the title to the property shall be made without delay. We shall see, Mary Benson, if you do not yet cringe to the despised Guilbert Morford."

Setting his teeth in bitter energy, he made his way toward the railroad-station to take train for central Pennsylvania.

The time had come to explode the rocket he had so long been preparing.

CHAPTER XI.

A STARTLING SURPRISE.

HAD Guilbert Morford dreamed of all that was taking place in the town he had left, he would have changed the direction of his journey. There are steps from which there is no drawing back. One of those steps he was about to take in utter ignorance of the mysterious events that threatened disaster to his scheme.

We must return to the house of Dr. Brown, and to the parties whom we left there in a position of startling gravity.

Jerry Jarman, as we have said, stood with his back to the door of the room that held the corpse. He had locked the door and flung the key down the stairs up which his assailants were ascending. The hammer was in his hand, and he threatened to brain any one who should try to open that door.

It was a striking situation. On the stairs just below him stood Dr. Brown and the student. They had partly recovered from their momentary fright, and were returning to see what had occurred, when they were thus confronted.

Other doors in the house were opening, and frightened voices demanding what had happened.

"Mercy on me, if it isn't the boy Jerry! The boy I locked up a half-hour ago! This is extraordinary. How did you get out and get here, you young rascal?"

"Sleight o' hand," answered Jerry, coolly. "And it'll be sleight o' arm if yer don't keep yer distance."

"Give way there, you little vagabond! We must an' will go into that room."

"If ye do, it'll be with bu'sted cocoanuts!" declared the resolute boy.

"Gracious mercy! James, whatever is the matter?" exclaimed Mrs. Brown, who had run half dressed from her room. "Is it burglars, or fire? I'm scared half out of my senses."

"Go back to your room," ordered the doctor, sternly. "It is nothing of any importance. I will attend to it."

"Ye're not a-goin' ter cut him up while I'm about," answered Jerry. "I gav him my word and I'm goin' ter stick to it. Yer sha'n't jab no knives inter him this load o' poles."

"We won't do it, I promise you," replied the doctor. "Drop your hammer, and open the door."

"Nary time. Ain't goin' back on ther ghost, and yer kin blow till yer're blue."

"You young bound! if you won't give way, we'll make you!" cried the doctor, in a sudden anger. "Be ready, Jerry. Make a rush on him. This thing has gone far enough."

He rushed up the stairs, followed by the student. In a moment they were on the landing, face to face with Jerry.

But they paused abruptly when they saw him raise his hammer in a threatening manner, while his face was set in a fashion that meant work.

The doctor began to parley again. He did not care to have his head split open. Yet there was no time to lose. The corpse must be returned to its tomb, or there would be serious trouble. And he must learn the reason of those blood-drops that had oozed from the breast on the insertion of the knife.

At that moment Jerry sprang forward from the door, letting his hammer hand fall, while his head was turned sharply back over his shoulder.

His face was ashy white, and his knees trembled.

"Lord save us all!" he cried, in thrilling accents. "It's up and walkin' 'bout! Don't you

hear that? Ther ghost's up and walkin', sure as ye're alive."

Mysterious footsteps in the room behind him had come to his ears. The scare was more than Jerry could stand. He let fall the hammer, and rushed forward, into the very grasp of his assailants.

Yet they were in almost as much of a tremble as he. They had not heard the steps, but his fright was infectious.

"Yer kin go there if yer want to now," cried Jerry. "Only don't ask me. Got 'nough o' ghosts fur one night, I have."

"Ghosts be hanged!" cried Doctor Brown, who had recovered from his momentary scare. "There are no such things. Where is the key? Give it to me this instant. I must investigate that room."

Jerry felt in his pockets for the key, and then examined the floor where he stood. He was so shaken up that he forgot that he had flung the key away.

The student remembered this.

"He flung something down the stairs. It must have been the key."

He ran down instantly to search for it. But it was rather dark, and no sign of the key could be found.

The doctor followed him, with Jerry at his heels. The boy had got over some of his fright, yet did not care to stop top near that room door alone.

What was to come of the handkerchief act he had no very clear idea. He had a dim fancy that it was in some strange way to bring the corpse back to life, yet he had not thought of this on hearing that startling sound within the room.

They continued their search for several minutes, but the key was not to be found.

"We must have a light," declared the doctor. "It is folly to grope here in the dark."

"Here is one, James," called Mrs. Brown from the head of the stairs. "What forever is the matter? Why don't you tell me? Do you want to scare me into fits?"

"It's only a trifle of dissection," said the doctor, soothingly. "There is really nothing to be frightened at. I will tell you the whole story in a few minutes. Just now I have something more important to do."

He took the lamp from her hand and came down to where Jerry and the student were still seeking the key.

Even with the aid of the lamp it did not prove easy to find. It had, as such things will sometimes do, slipped into a hidden crack behind the carpet, where they did not think of looking.

It was fully ten minutes after Jerry had heard the noise in the room before the key was found.

The doctor seized it a little angrily. He was out of temper with this provoking delay.

He led the way up-stairs, too eager to learn the state of things within the dissecting-room to stop and give Jerry the shaking he deserved.

The others followed, Jerry with a very queer sensation, between fright and curiosity.

The doctor inserted the key in the door with a slight degree of hesitation. Despite himself the various strange things which had happened had infected him, and though he told himself it was all nonsense, and that the corpse was still stretched on the table, yet he turned the key with a hand that slightly shook.

Flinging the door open he looked eagerly into the room. The others crowded closely behind him.

The table on which the corpse had laid was directly before him, with the light of the gas shining upon it.

To his utter surprise it was empty.

He turned back to Jerry.

"What have you done there, you hound?"

"Nothin'," declared Jerry. "I left him layin' there, sure as shootin'."

With a growl of disbelief the doctor hurried into the room, expecting to find the corpse on the floor.

To his yet greater surprise no trace of it was visible.

"Good heavens, the boy must have flung it out of the window!" cried the doctor. "You rascally young reprobate, tell me this instant what you have done?"

He caught Jerry by the shoulder, and gave him a furious shake.

"Couldn't 'a' lifted him ter save my buttons," declared Jerry. "I left him a-layin' jist there. Look out ther winder if you think I'm a-lyin'."

The student was already doing so. The moonlight clearly illuminated the ground below. No trace of the vanished corpse was visible.

It was a most extraordinary circumstance.

They looked at one another with widely distended eyes.

Doctor Brown started after a minute and again caught Jerry by the shoulder.

"You had confederates," he declared. "You threw out the corpse, and they have carried it off. Where is the ladder you used?"

"Here," said Jerry, pointing to the ivy. "That's all the ladder I see'd. And I dunno what confederates 'd want with a dead corpse. They couldn't salt him down, nor make boardin'-house hash outer him. It don't stand ter reason."

The doctor looked closely at the boy. He seemed to be in sound earnest. And besides, he could not have carried the corpse to the window and thrown it out in the short time he was in the room.

"What under heaven has become of it, then?" he asked, in helpless wonder.

"S'pect he's turned into a ghost ag'in, and is off on a graveyard stroll," said Jerry, doggedly. "Jist as he did when I went to ther coffin."

"As for his leaving the coffin, I am responsible for that," acknowledged the doctor. "But this disappearance is the strangest thing I ever dreamed of."

"What is this?" exclaimed the student suddenly, pointing to a sheet of paper that lay on a desk against the wall.

The doctor sprang hastily forward and seized the paper.

It fell from his grasp an instant after, and slowly descended to the floor. He stood shaking like a leaf, and with a face of ashy pallor.

"Good God! it is George Benson's handwriting!" he exclaimed in a voice that quivered with horror. "I would know it among a thousand. Is he alive again? Gracious heaven, what can these strange things mean?"

"You've hit it, or ther' ain't no sich things as b'iled beans!" cried Jerry, as he sprang forward and picked up the fallen sheet. "He's alive again, and that's jist what's the matter."

He read the mysterious document with eager and burning curiosity:

"Let no living man pursue me. I am away on a specter's business. Let what has passed be kept a dead secret. He who reveals it shall be severely punished; he who keeps it shall be well rewarded; beware the revenge of

"THE GHOST."

Jerry dropped the paper again, as if it had burned his fingers.

"Good gracious, he isn't alive arter all! He says hisself he's the ghost."

"And that's a proof that he isn't," answered the doctor, who was regaining his composure.

"Ghosts don't write, and that paper was written by the living hand of George Benson. There is some strange mystery in all this," he continued.

"We must, for our own sakes, obey his injunction, and keep this a dead secret."

"Nobody won't git it outer me," declared Jerry, solemnly.

"I will not breathe a word of it," declared the student.

"That is right. We must all keep still," said the doctor. "But what is the explanation of this remarkable incident? There is nothing like it in the books. When the knife went in some drops of blood came out. That indicates that the man was not dead. Did the loss of those few drops break the trance that has held him? Has he sprung from the window and run off in a fright, on his sudden recovery, with no clothing but that thin sheet?"

"There is no fright about it," answered the student. "He had his wits about him. What he has written on that paper is proof of that."

"And he has took my handkercher, too," declared Jerry, looking round him.

"Your handkerchief! What do you mean by that? How could he get your handkerchief?"

"Reckon I've put my foot in it," acknowledged Jerry. "Mought as well go in for the whole hog. Tell ye what, Doctor Brown, it weren't you that brought him to. It were this yere chicken. I've got somethin' cur'us ter tell you, if you say you won't speak a word on it ter anybody."

The doctor and the student, with new curiosity at these words, readily pledged themselves.

Jerry, thus encouraged, told his whole strange story, much to the surprise and interest of his auditors.

"The plot deepens," cried the doctor. "It is a regular Romeo and Juliet affair. He took a four days' sleeping draught. Have you that vial?"

Jerry produced it. The doctor held it to his nose, with a slow shake of the head.

"That explains all," he said. "I know the drug."

CHAPTER XII.

TRACKING THE FUGITIVES. A DISTRESSING EVENT.

THERE was a terrible excitement among the people of the town on the morning after the occurrence just narrated. Not that all the occurrences were made public. The greater part of them were kept a profound secret. But the rifling of the grave became known, and this was enough to set all the citizens in a quiver of excitement and indignation.

The mysterious part of the affair was the escape of Jerry Jarman from the lock-up, and the finding him afterward in the Benson vault, before the empty coffin.

What in the world took him there? How did he obtain the key? The natural conclusion was that Jerry was connected with the grave-robbers, and had been left behind by them to replace the cover on the coffin and lock the vault, while they carried off the corpse.

This idea was strengthened by the story of the constable, who took advantage of the opportunity to screen himself, and declared that the escape of his prisoner had been aided by confederates.

One of them had been concealed behind the door of his house, and had knocked him down with a black-jack at the moment he was about to seize the flying fugitive. He showed his cut and bleeding head in evidence.

"But we snatched him again," he said grimly.

"The lads locked him up at Doctor Brown's. I bet high he don't get off so easy this time. He's a sweet youngster, in my notion—quite an honor to his country. To steal a twenty-dollar bill and a dead body within two days isn't slow work. I guess we'll have to elect that young gentleman to a vacant place in the penitentiary."

He made his way without delay to Dr. Brown's residence, attended by a crowd of curious followers.

The doctor met them at the door. He had got rid of his late nervousness, and was cool and collected.

"There is quite a party of you," he remarked.

"Rather too many to invade my quiet residence. You are after the boy, eh? All right. Here is the key of my strong room. I give up responsibility for him into your hands. But don't bring in more than two or three of these people."

The constable took the key, and picked out a few of his followers to accompany him. They followed Dr. Brown up-stairs to the third floor.

"Here is the room," he remarked quietly, pointing to a strong oak door.

The constable inserted the key and unlocked the door.

The door was thrown open and the constable entered. A cry of surprise and anger came instantly from him.

"There's no boy here!" he shouted, with an oath. "The room is empty."

The doctor hastened forward, with a great show of astonishment.

"I locked him in myself last night. He must be there," he exclaimed. "Look around. He is hiding somewhere."

"I reckon so," answered the constable, dryly, pointing to the open window. "Somewhere out there."

"But how could he get to the ground? He would break his neck to jump."

The constable looked out of the window.

"The whole job is clear," he cried, after a minute. "He made a ladder of the ivy. You can see how it is stripped and loosened."

"I shouldn't wonder if you were correct," answered the doctor, with an air as if this were something entirely new to him. "But who would have dreamed of anybody going down the ivy?"

"By the saints I'll have him, or know the reason why!" exclaimed the furious constable, as he hastily ran for the stairs. "The whole country shall be scoured. My professional honor is at stake."

He left the house in great haste, leaving it to his followers to explain to the party outside. The doctor looked after him with a peculiar smile.

"That little difficulty is settled," he said. "I doubt if he will find the boy as easily as he thinks. It is lucky, however, that he did not think of searching the house. That room with the broken sash looked suspicious."

"I have been playing a dangerous game, and have made a lucky escape. But that remarkable circumstance of the disappearance of the corpse! I never heard of anything like it. They must be right. Benson is alone. There will be some strange revelations in this town before many days. Meanwhile I must keep my secret."

The infuriated and perplexed constable had made all haste to the town. Here he telegraphed the circumstances to the police of all the neighboring localities. The town authorities hastily met and offered a reward for the capture of the fugitive. This fact was telegraphed also, and the whole country for thirty miles round was put on the alert to arrest the flying boy.

On the afternoon of that day another event happened of a distressing nature. It was an event of interest to our story.

A gentleman of the town, a relative of George Benson, called on Dr. Brown with a look of great distress and concern.

"I hardly know what in the world to do, doctor," he exclaimed. "I wish to Heaven I was well out of the job."

"I don't know what in the world you mean," cried the doctor in surprise at this opening.

"I want your backing, at any rate, for it is a delicate matter, and your professional aid may be needed, for there is no telling how it may affect her."

"Affect who? What one are you talking about? Mercy on us, Middleton, do you want me to sit here and guess riddles?"

"I wish you would. What to do is a riddle I can't guess— Now, now, don't say a word. I'm coming to it. You know, of course, that Benson's daughter, Mary, is traveling with some friends in Europe. I wrote her a month ago of her father's illness. It did not seem then to be serious."

"That's a fact," chimed in the doctor.

"Three weeks ago when he seemed to be getting worse, I wrote again. I told her that he would likely pull through, and that there was no occasion for her to be alarmed."

"And is Mary Benson your riddle?"

"Yes. I find that my last letter scared her. She left her friends and started home the instant she received it. She was in London at the time. She landed in New York this morning. I have just got a telegram announcing her arrival. And I find from it that she already knows of her father's death."

"What a shock it must have been to the poor girl!" exclaimed the doctor with much feeling.

"But don't you see I have ten times a worse one in store for her? This body-stealing business— Good Heavens, how will I ever tell her that?"

"It's awkward, I confess," acknowledged the doctor, taking in the full force of the situation. "It may upset the girl entirely. Why not run over to New York and try to keep her there for a day or two?"

"That won't work. What excuse could I make? And she is likely on the track of her telegram. I expect she will be in by eight o'clock to-night at the latest."

"I see, I see," answered the doctor, holding down his head in deep thought. "She is a high-strung girl, and all this at once is enough to kill her. Where is Guil Morford? Can you not throw it on him?"

"He left town yesterday, and has not yet returned."

"It may not be so bad," continued the doctor. "I have an idea. I think I can help you out, and save Miss Benson from too great a shock."

"Good," exclaimed Middleton. "What is your idea, doctor?"

"Oh, it is simply a new nerve quiter. A South American drug that has just come out. Leave me alone with her for ten minutes after she comes, and I engage to break the shock."

"I will be very glad to do so. Can you come over to my house early?"

"Not before eight—or maybe nine. I have an evening round to make among my patients. But you must keep this matter quiet. Try to soothe her on the subject of her father's death, and say not a word about the body-stealing. Leave that for me."

"I shall certainly do so," answered Middleton, as he took his hat. "And I am grateful enough to you for relieving me of this unpleasant duty."

After a few words more he took his leave, much easier in mind than he had been.

Dr. Brown smiled quietly to himself as he returned from the door.

"I fancy that South American drug will work," he said. "I can trust Mary Benson with the secret. She is a girl of character. By the way, it used to be said that Morford was smitten with her, and that she gave him the mitten. Can there be anything in that?"

It was nine o'clock that night before his engagements were through. He hastened immediately to Middleton's house.

That gentleman met him at the door, with

a look on his face that gave the worthy doctor a start.

"Mercy!" he cried. "What is the matter? You look as if you had seen a ghost!"

"I have sent two messengers for you," exclaimed Middleton. "She's in a terrible way."

"Have you told her? And after our arrangement?"

"Good heavens, no! Yet she heard it. The most unlucky thing. It slipped out from a visitor in her hearing. She went on so we could not keep the whole story from her. You never saw a girl so affected. She is now in a dead faint."

"Confusion!" cried the doctor. "This is out of all reason. How long ago was this?"

"A half-hour. Have you brought the South American drug?"

"I am afraid it won't work now," said the doctor angrily, as he bustled in. "Where is she?"

Middleton led the way to a rear room. It was occupied by two women who seemed in a state of half distraction. On a sofa over which they were bending lay the form of a lovely woman, quite young apparently, and with a face of classic outlines.

But just now it was of deadly pallor. Her eyes were closed, and she seemed in a deep sleep.

The doctor had them all at work without delay, bringing such remedies as suggested themselves to his experience.

He was fifteen minutes engaged before he could bring out a show of returning animation. At length a faint color came to the lovely cheek, and the closed lips slightly opened.

"All leave the room," he ordered. "She will connect all of you with the cause of her trouble. She must see nobody but me when she recovers. Trust me to soothe her shaken nerves."

They were all glad to obey.

Dr. Brown locked the door behind them, and returned to his patient. A change had come over her in the moment of his absence. Her eyes were open, and she was staring distractedly around the room.

"Where am I?" she demanded, in a startled tone, lifting herself on her elbow, and gazing eagerly at the doctor. "What has happened? Who are you?"

"Be calm, my child," he said, soothingly. "You are safe at home. I am your old physician, Doctor Brown."

"Oh, I know now!" she cried, with a half shriek, springing wildly to her feet. "It all comes back! My father! My poor dead father! The grave-robbers! Oh, the dread of it!"

She flung her arms wildly in the air, while her face was convulsed with terror.

He caught her as she seemed on the point of falling again.

"You must control yourself!" he cried sternly in her ear. "You are mistaken. You have been deceived."

"Mistaken? Deceived?"

"Yes. He is not dead! His body has not been stolen! Do you hear and understand?"

"I hear, but I do not understand," she murmured.

"I have a great secret for your ears," he continued, glad to have arrested her attention. "Strange events have happened. Can I trust to your utter silence? It is not I that ask, but your father through me. Have I your pledge to secrecy?"

"But this is extraordinary! What can you mean?"

She sunk into a chair by the open window, staring at him as if she deemed him mad.

"I mean just what I have said, Miss Benson. Your father is alive. The coffin that was robbed never contained his dead body."

"I do not believe you!" she cried, indignantly. "What sort of a story is this you tell me? If he is alive, where is he? He died and was buried. The whole town followed to his tomb. Pledge myself to keep your secret? What sort of a secret is this I am to keep?"

"The secret of the dead alive," came in a strange voice, as if through the open window. "Don't breathe it to a living soul—for your father's sake."

The poor girl sprung to her feet with a scream.

"My father's voice! It is my father's voice! Then he is not dead, indeed!" she exclaimed.

She flew to the window, followed hastily by the doctor. But no one was visible by the vague lamplight.

CHAPTER XIII.

GUILBERT MORFORD TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

It was not till the second day after the date of the events of the last chapter that Guilbert Morford returned.

There was a look of complete satisfaction on

his face as he left the train and walked up the streets of the town. He stopped at the office of the magistrate, which lay on his way to his home.

"Good-morning, squire," he said, cheerily. "I presume you thought I ran away from you the other day. Couldn't help it. I had business of more importance than sending a vagrant to jail. I am at your service now whenever you wish to bring up the case."

The squire looked at him in surprise.

"I am ready at any time you can bring me the boy," he answered.

"Me bring you the boy? I haven't him in charge."

"Nor I either. Do you mean to say that you don't know he has escaped, and that the whole county is after him on that other charge?"

"What other charge?"

"The grave-robbing case. The stealing of the body from the Benson vault."

The look of satisfaction suddenly vanished from Morford's face.

"I do not understand you," he faltered. "What under heaven do you mean?"

"Why, the boy escaped from the lock-up the night of the day you left town. At midnight he was found in the Benson vault. It was open and the coffin rifled. He was captured, but escaped again. That is all we know about it. A reward has been offered, and the whole country is on the search for the boy and his confederates."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Morford, paler than ever, if possible. "And you say no trace of them has been found?"

"Not a shadow."

"What reward was offered?" asked Morford.

"One hundred for the boy, and five hundred for the whole party, with the corpse."

"I wish to double these rewards," he replied with a show of energy. "Will you publish the offer, squire? And can you give me a glass of water? I feel desperately faint."

The squire did so, and after some further expressions of distress at the robbery, and indignation against the robbers, Morford left the office, with a return of his lost color.

He seemed full of sorrow, however, as he made his way along the street, and it was not till he was past the vision of all eyes and safe within the library room at his own house that he permitted his true feelings to find vent.

"Victory! victory!" he cried, in a tone of exultation. "I was fearfully startled at first, yet nothing could have worked better for my purpose. So that explains the strange behavior of the boy. I fancied he had some understanding with George. I see now that he was approached by the grave-robbers and entered into league with them. He must have stolen the vault key for them."

He looked in the drawer in which this key had been laid after the funeral. It was gone!

"That clears up the whole business," he exclaimed. "The boy stole the key."

He little dreamed that the key he sought had been taken by Dr. Brown in his desire to discover the cause of George Benson's death, and that Jerry's key came from the sick man himself.

"All is safe now," he declared. "On every side I am secure. It is too late to discover anything wrong about the body. The drug is warranted to disappear in four days. I can snap my fingers at the world."

He took good care, however, to put on a grave and careworn countenance when he again entered the street. He must wear a mask at present.

There was another piece of highly-interesting information told him on his second visit to the streets. This was the return of Mary Benson.

It was from Dr. Brown that he learned of the young lady's return from Europe. The doctor's eyes were fixed on him with a critical gaze that put the villain on the alert to wear his mask of grief and concern.

"Returned?" he cried. "Now? In the midst of these terrible events? Why, it is enough to kill her!"

"It did, almost," answered the doctor, briefly. "The shock was a dreadful one. She is better now, but it took all my skill to bring her back to consciousness."

"I fancy your drugs would be of little use to cure a sick heart," answered Morford. "The poor girl must be terribly overcome."

"I don't say that she is quite herself yet," replied the doctor. "But Mary Benson has got plenty of backbone—you know that. She is a girl that would die rather than have herself pitted."

"She is proud enough, I admit. I am sorry to say she will need it all, for—"

"What?" asked the doctor, as Morford paused.

"No matter; I was too fast. There may be another trouble for her in the wind, but it can keep until she has got over her present ones."

"Sometimes a new trouble lessens the weight of old ones," suggested the doctor.

"Yes, yes; very true. But this trouble comes from me. It is one of those things I cannot help, out of justice to myself. Yet I can keep it back for a while."

"By the way, now you speak of it," remarked the doctor, as with a sudden thought—"you have been looked after, Morford. Life insurance agents from New York. It seems you had a crushing big risk on Benson's life. Fifty thousand! Whew! you went it heavy."

"They have been here?" demanded Morford, keeping his composure with a strong effort.

"They applied to you?"

"Just so."

"Well?"

"I told them all the circumstances, resurrection and all," answered the doctor. "So far as I knew, it was a legitimate death, so I told them. If you had put your cousin out of the way for his insurance you had fooled me as well as him." He laughed with these words; his laugh feebly echoed by Morford. "I advised them to take up the corpse and examine it—if they could find it. Otherwise they had best pay the risk and ask no questions."

They laughed together again, the doctor's laugh being very hearty.

"I don't fancy that I would object to their examining the body, if the grave-robbers had given them a chance," declared Morford. "I hope they will find it, and satisfy themselves. These fellows are so cheerfully ready to take your insurance money, and so insultingly suspicious when the time comes to pay out theirs. But I hardly think they can overthrow my claim."

"A sound and strong one, eh, Morford?"

"I fancy my net will hold their gold fish."

"Ha, ha! Good—very good! But I must go. I am chatting away here, while my patients are groaning for medicine. Good-day."

Morford walked away with redoubled satisfaction. He felt that his game had been shrewdly played, and that the fifty thousand were his. He could not see a loophole of escape for the insurance companies.

But this was not the only source of his satisfaction. He had not been idle during his three days' absence from the town. He had made good use of his time in searching the court records of the Pennsylvania county to which he had gone.

All had proved as he hoped. He could bring his claim against Benson's estate when he would. The papers he had received from the pettifogging lawyer were too strong to be broken.

Yet before entering up this claim he had another project to carry out.

He waited until a full week had passed after his return. During that time the situation remained unchanged. Jerry Jarman and his supposed confederates continued at liberty, despite every effort to discover them. And no trace of the stolen body had been found. The only discovery was one made by Dr. Brown, that his best suit of clothes had vanished from the dissecting room with the corpse. But this little point he kept to himself.

It looked on the surface, as if the schemes of Guilbert Morford were in perfect train. He heard, on the morning of the day to which our story has now arrived, from two of the Life Insurance Companies.

They advised him that his claim was passed upon as correct, and that they stood ready to pay the money after the necessary preliminaries.

"Good. The other company must come round in a day or two," he remarked. "Now for my remaining task. She must yield, or she shall suffer."

He was near the house in which Mary Benson was staying. A few minutes brought him to the door.

"Yes. Miss Benson was in." The servant took up his card, and he was quickly ushered into the presence of the young lady.

She awaited her visitor standing, in a proud, self-reliant attitude.

"Excuse me, Mr. Morford," she quietly remarked, declining to take the hand which he somewhat nervously offered. "Our relations at our last meeting were hardly of a kind that permit me to receive you as a friend. To what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"My late relations to your father at least, should overcome any remnant of old resentment,

Miss Benson. I assure you I have forgotten it all."

"I do not forget so easily," she replied with a curling lip.

He helped himself to a seat, with a recovery of the composure which had been shaken by her reception.

"On the occasion to which you refer, Miss Benson, I was too hasty. I admit it all, and ask pardon for what I said in a moment of bitter disappointment. I beg pardon more fully for another reason, which is that the feeling which I expressed for you then, I still feel. I love you now as I did then. And I am here to-day to renew my suit."

She looked him in the face with eyes that seemed to search to his soul. A laugh broke from her lips that was startling in its concentrated scorn.

"It is rather awkward for you, Guilbert Morford," she said, "that father and daughter differ somewhat in character. You seem to have fooled my father to the end. You have never fooled me. Have you anything further to say? What other business brings you?"

Her words and tone were so cuttingly disdainful and so full of bitter scorn, that the man before her could no longer contain his rage. He sprang to his feet with his face blazing with fury.

"My other business may not prove so comfortable to you," he hotly exclaimed. "I am sorry to be obliged to tell you that there is a flaw in your father's title to his estate. He was not quite wide-awake enough in buying that estate. There was an unsettled claim to it which he overlooked, and which I bought up with the intention of settling it on you as a wedding present on the day of our marriage. It proves to be a somewhat valuable claim," he continued, mockingly. "It has been tested, and it hands over your father's entire estate to the owner of the necessary documents. To your humble servant and suitor that is. I am obliged to say, my dear cousin, that if you refuse my hand you consign yourself to beggary. Not a very agreeable prospect."

The proud girl clutched the chair by which she stood, while her eyes blazed, and a high color came into her cheeks.

"Is that all, Mr. Morford?"

"There only remains the reverse of the picture. If you accept my hand, you will be rich and happy. It is the choice between riches and beggary I offer you."

"Very well, sir, I accept beggary," she replied with a strange smile. "So that item of business is settled. Is there anything more?"

His eyes fairly glared with fury as he looked into her coolly scornful face, and heard the slow fall of her words.

"You have said it, my proud beauty," he hissed. "We shall see who wins. I will bring your pride to the dust. By Heaven, I will! You shall yet beg on your knees for the hand you now so scornfully disdain."

She made no reply. But the strange smile came again on her face, as he passed in fury through the door.

"We shall see, Guilbert Morford," she said. "Your game is not yet won."

Within an hour from that moment he had put certain papers in the hands of an attorney of the town, with strict orders that he should bring immediate suit for the estate of George Benson, deceased.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HEARING OF JERRY JARMAN.

"How d'ye do, squire? Been told as folks are lookin' arter me. Jist stepped round ter see what's ther row."

It was the voice of Jerry Jarman. And it was the knowing and impudent face of Jerry that looked up into the squire's astonished eyes, with as much ease as if he had just come on an invitation to dinner.

Jerry had his bundle over his shoulder, at the end of a short stick, and seemed to have just come in from a tramp.

The magistrate looked at him as if he had been a specter risen from the grave.

"Well, I never!" he ejaculated. "If it isn't that young thief and grave-robber, I'm a sinner! So you have been nabbed, eh? The constable is outside there, I suppose?"

"Dunno," responded Jerry. "I ain't see'd the critter. Got sick and tired o' havin' folks tellin' lies on me, that's the whole long and short on it. Dropped 'round yere ter have my character set square."

He coolly took a seat and laid his bundle carefully under the chair.

"Dig in now, squire. I'm yer boss. But I'd

like yer ter settle this little job in short meter, so's I kin catch ther next train for York. Got bizness in ther metropolis."

The magistrate sat staring at the impudent boy as if he had discovered some new animal, never seen in a menagerie.

There were others present now. Several persons had seen the boy entering the office, and the room was quickly filling up with curious citizens of the town.

"Why, blame your impertinent picture!" cried the squire angrily, as his voice came back to him. "You want to go to New York? You will have a roundabout journey there, by way of the State's Prison, my sharp youngster."

"That's a lie, squire. Don't want ter be impudent, but that's a lie. I reckon I won't go ter no States Prison this load o' poles. Maybe somebody else will."

The boy's cool impudence had by this time put the worthy magistrate in a rage.

"There is quite enough of this," he violently exclaimed. "Here, won't somebody go and tell Constable Smith that he is wanted? And some one else go for Guilbert Morford, and tell him that I have the thief, and his evidence is needed?"

"I'll go arter him, if nobody else keers to," responded Jerry.

"Hold your tongue!" roared the squire.

"Can't do it. Had it 'iled this mornin', and it won't stop. As fer ther constable I don't think he's o' much use. Couldn't keep me when he had me. And it were my own legs as brung me here ter-day. Ain't got ther least notion o' rummin' away ag'in. Goin' ter see this circus through fu'st."

The angry squire stared at him.

"Where in the world have you been?" he demanded. "The whole country has been hunting for you, and here you walk in as easily as if you had been staying at the hotel."

"Allers do it that way," answered Jerry, crossing his legs coolly. "Tell yer all 'bout it arter awhile, squire. Got ter git through our little preliminaries fu'st, you know. Calkerlate ter open yer eyes a trifle fore ye're much older, squire."

That ended the conversation for the magistrate. He was completely nonplused. He sat back in his chair, staring in a helpless fashion at Jerry, who continued as cool as a cucumber.

In a half-hour afterward the party in the office had been increased by the addition of Guilbert Morford, Constable Smith, Dr. Brown, and the men who had arrested Jerry in the cemetery.

Without delay the magistrate called the case of Guilbert Morford *versus* Jerry Jarman. The boy's behavior since he entered the office had incensed the worthy magistrate against him, and he was in a mood to stretch the law a little, if necessary, for the purpose of sending him to prison.

Without further delay he put the case on trial, calling Guilbert Morford as the first witness.

We must run hastily over this hearing, as it brought out nothing new to our readers. Morford swore positively to two important particulars. He had seen the boy in his private library close by his desk, he declared. He had paid him his wages out of some money in this desk, and carelessly let him see the money.

On examining it after the boy had left the house he discovered that a twenty-dollar bill was missing. He had at once got out a warrant for his arrest, and put it in the hands of Constable Smith.

He went on to say that, after his return from his journey, and his learning of the stealing of the corpse from the vault, he had again examined his desk, and discovered that the key of the vault was gone.

This proved to him that the boy was an agent of the body-stealers, and had been employed by them to procure the key. In looking for the key he had evidently taken some of the money.

The constable was next called, and testified to the arrest of the fugitive, and the finding of the money upon him.

"We may as well hear the two charges together," remarked the magistrate. "The grave-robbery is much the more serious of the two. And it is important to discover the villains with whom the prisoner was confederated."

He proceeded to call witnesses to this charge, bringing out the facts of Jerry's escape from the lock-up, in which the constable declared he was aided by a confederate.

The story of the pursuit followed, and of the discovery of the boy in the vault, with the various circumstances. Also of his detention at Doctor Brown's house, and his escape. Mr. Morford was again called, to testify once more to the loss of the key.

His evidence, given at considerable length, seemed conclusive as to the guilt of the prisoner. The squire looked at him with sure triumph in his eye.

"I don't see that this case need go any further here," he remarked. "The prisoner must be held for trial before the court. I can promise him, however, as a reward for his impudence, a term of eight or ten years in prison, where he can have ample time to reflect on the disadvantages of ill-doing. If he has any information to give concerning his confederates in the grave-robbing it will undoubtedly be a point in his favor, and will shorten his sentence. Have you anything to say on that subject?" he asked Jerry.

"Got several things to say, arter you're through," responded Jerry. "Jist now I only want ter say as this affair's been kinder one-sided. Ain't guv me no chance ter call my witnesses yit."

"Oh, if you have any evidence to offer in your favor, of course I will hear it," answered the squire, a little taken aback.

"I'd jist like ter ax old Smith there, ther constable, how much money Guil Morford said I stole from him. That's a little p'int o' some value."

The constable colored at this plain question, and a confused look came upon Morford's face. Evidently something unexpected had been sprung upon him.

He was obliged to answer, however, that the loss had been placed at four dollars, and that nothing had been said about twenty dollars until after that sum had been found on the boy.

"Don't that there look a little thin, squire?" demanded Jerry. "There weren't no four dollars found on me, as I knows on."

Morford sprung up hastily at these words. "I did not miss the twenty till afterward," he declared. "Not till I examined my desk more closely."

"Yer knowed I had four dollars, though," said the cool prisoner. "'Kaze you guv it ter me yerself fur wages."

A change came over the squire's face at these words. He looked significantly at Morford.

"The young rascal does not lack cunning," said the latter. "But how does he explain the possession of the vault key, that was locked up in my desk?"

The looks of the audience changed again. Here was a decidedly suspicious point.

"If ther squire don't mind, I'd like ter call a witness on that p'int," declared Jerry.

"Very well. Name your witness."

"My witness is Doctor Brown."

This name made something of a sensation in the room. Dr. Brown pushed his way up to the front of the squire's desk, and announced himself as ready to give any evidence in his power.

"Will you tell what you know about the case?" asked the squire.

"I can testify that the prisoner did not take that missing key," answered the witness, in a loud and clear tone.

"Ah! that is important. On what do you base that statement?"

"On the fact that I took the key myself."

There was a decided sensation at these words.

"You took it? And gave it to the boy?"

"No, sir. I have it yet. Here it is."

He laid it on the squire's desk.

"But I have here the key that was found on the boy! Are there two keys?"

"It seems so."

"But where did the boy get his?"

"You had better ask him."

"Tell yer arter awhile, squire," answered Jerry. "That p'int don't come in jist here."

Morford looked on with staring eyes, and a slight pallor in his face.

"But why did you take the key?" persisted the squire.

"Because I wanted the body," answered the doctor, in clear, cold accents.

He turned and fixed his eyes on the disturbed countenance of Gabriel Morford.

"I suspected foul play in the death of George Benson. I was refused the opportunity of making a *post mortem* examination. I was determined, in the interest of justice, that it should be done. But as I did not want to make a public scandal, if it could be avoided, I took a quieter course. You need look no further for the grave-robbers. I am the only resurrectionist."

"You?" The squire stared in dismay. "Do you know the consequences of what you have done?"

"I do, most certainly."

"But what do you mean by foul play? What have you done with the corpse? What have you discovered?"

"I suspected that George Benson died of poison," answered the doctor coolly. "I have discovered no poison in the body."

At these words Guilbert Morford, who had grown strangely disturbed during the last remarks, recovered his composure, and sprung forward with a show of indignation.

"Then, by heaven, you shall suffer for this!" he violently exclaimed. "You shall learn that grave-robbing cannot be practiced with impunity in this State! And I shall sue you for libel, as I am a living man! I make the charge of—"

His further words were lost in a confusion at the entrance of the room. There was a pushing to and fro, with clatter of feet. When it ended, the fair face of Mary Benson appeared amid the crowd of men.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEAD ALIVE.

"I HAVE something to say before this case is ended," remarked the new witness, in a clear, resolute voice.

Morford, at sight of her, looked for the moment as if he would sink through the floor.

"I know what has passed," she remarked. "I have been near at hand, and have been kept advised of all that has been done as yet. I know that the attempt to criminate this young prisoner has signally failed."

"I will further say that I accuse this man, Guilbert Morford, of seeking to murder my father by poison."

Morford's pale face blanched for the instant, but its scornful look quickly returned.

"I shall enter into no controversy with this young lady," he quietly remarked. "I think she is hardly herself. But I must demand that this serious charge shall be proved or dismissed."

"I am not here idly," answered the indignant girl, not looking at him again. "I will briefly give my reasons for the accusation I have made."

"In the first place my poor father lay sick at the house, and under the charge of this man, and died of a strange disease that puzzled the doctor, and roused suspicions in both the doctor and the nurse."

"In the second place, since his death, this man proves to have an insurance of fifty thousand dollars on his life. In the third place, he has just brought forward a claim against my dear father's estate, based on papers which nobody knew of before, yet against which my lawyer can find no defense."

"Then, Miss Benson, you accuse me of murdering your father, because I have a legal claim against his estate?" Morford demanded mockingly.

"Those papers were never heard of till after his death. And for the reason that you knew he could disprove them. You had to get rid of him first."

These words brought all eyes on Morford. He smiled disdainfully.

"That is easily said," he replied. "Your charge is a grave one, Miss Benson. Have you any evidence at all to offer?"

"Doctor Brown suspected poisoning," she continued. "He has found no evidence, to be sure, but—"

"That ends Doctor Brown. What else?"

His tone began to have its effect on the audience. Even the squire looked up in inquiry.

"I am sorry, Miss Benson," said the squire, "that you prefer so serious a charge on such slight grounds. You accuse a reputable citizen of murdering your father, on what is no evidence at all."

"I do not accuse him of murdering—only of trying to murder," she corrected.

"If he was poisoned and died it would be certainly murder."

"Maybe he was p'isoned and didn't die," broke in Jerry.

"It is all a conspiracy to ruin me!" exclaimed Morford, hotly. "By Heaven! they shall bitterly rue it! Every party to this conspiracy shall be taught that the honor of a reputable citizen cannot be assailed with impunity. You had better bring up the dead man as your next witness. I defy even him. I challenge him to appear, alive or dead!"

"I accept that challenge!" came in a deep and stern voice from the door.

The speaker was a tall man, who, during the past five minutes, had stood at the entrance to the office, with his hat drawn down.

He now stepped forward, pushing back the hat as he did so.

A cry of surprise broke from all persons present, as their eyes fell upon his face.

Guilbert Morford looked at him once, and then covered his face with his hands, as if to shut out a horrible spectacle. He fell back

shuddering against the wall, words coming in trembling accents from his white lips.

"George Benson! Great Heavens!"

"Alive or dead, you said. I come alive. Do not be frightened, gentlemen. I am solid flesh and blood."

"This is utterly incredible!" exclaimed the squire, with a pallid face. "I saw you buried myself."

"But did not see me resurrected," smiled the new-comer. "Listen to me, every one. I was buried, but I was not dead. This trembling villain here did his best to poison me. I let him think he was succeeding. I took a drug that seemed to bring me to death's door, and finally threw me into a death-like trance for four days. I was buried while in this trance."

"But, merciful heavens, how came you to life again? Suppose you had awakened in the grave?"

"I had provided for that. I had arranged a plan for my recovery at the proper time. I am happy to say that it succeeded. It is to this boy I owe my present life."

"That's jist as true as gospel," cried Jerry. "Kaze you'd been chopped inter mince-meat now on'y fur this coon."

"It is a lie! It is a vile plot! Let me away!" screamed the discovered villain, making a mad dash for the door.

"Seize that man! Don't let him escape!" cried Benson. "I have a serious charge to bring against him. If no one here can prove that he tried to poison me, I can. I have some of the poison in my hand. And I will tell you why he did so. It was not only to get the insurance on my life. It was to rob my daughter of her inheritance. The claim against my estate is invalid. It was paid off years ago. I can prove that. No one else would know where to seek the proof. And I can show that the papers he brings for his claim contain forged names and dates."

During these words Morford stood passively in the hands of two men, who had seized him near the door.

Now a roar of terror, rage and despair burst from his lips, and with a sudden surge he tore himself loose from the hands that held him.

Into the street he leaped and down it he flew, with the speed of a madman. The constable and some others followed him, but he distanced them.

He reached his house, flew into it, locking the door behind him, and up the stairs, locking every door as he went. His pursuers dispersed around the house, to guard every possible place of exit.

In the squire's office meanwhile a highly interesting conversation went on. Most of the story that was now made public the reader knows already. There are but a few points to clear up.

It appeared from George Benson's story that the fumes of the powerful liquid, which he had breathed in from the handkerchief, had broken up the trance in which he had so long lain.

He had risen to his feet while Jerry was defending himself at the door, helped himself to a suit of the doctor's clothes, and made his way to the ground, partly by aid of the ivy.

During the few days that had succeeded he had remained in concealment, most of the time in Dr. Brown's house, where Jerry had also been concealed. He was waiting patiently till his enemy should show his hand, and expose all his villainous plans. He was determined that the villain should have no loophole of escape.

At this moment the conference was suddenly interrupted.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" came a startling cry from the street.

A man rushed headlong into the office.

"It's Guil Morford's house," he shouted. "He is burning himself up!"

There was a wild rush to the scene. It proved as the man had said. Flames were bursting from the roof of the building. The servants had escaped, but Morford remained within and the stairs were a sheet of fire.

Within an hour the house tumbled to the ground, still burning fiercely, with its criminal owner lost among the flames.

And so our story ends, with the self-destruction of the villain and the happiness and prosperity of those whom he had sought to ruin.

We need only say that Jerry Jarman became the *protege* of George Benson, and the especial favorite of his daughter.

Jerry had gained the end he came to the country to find. He had made his fortune.

Not only his five hundred was duly paid, but he was sent to school, given a good education, and put in a position of trust in the town in which these events took place.

To-day he is a prominent business man of said town, and bids fair to be a rich man himself ere he is many years older.

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,
98 William Street, New York